

Following and Resurrection Holiness

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[0 : 00] Maybe you can hear me now. There we go. I'm plugged in. This movie came out in 1998 called The Holy Man, starred one of, I was going to say favorite. He's not really. I do kind of like him.

An actor called Eddie Murphy, and as a modern day holy man who helped people. And the only problem with this movie is that Eddie Murphy is usually a really fun, charismatic, excitable person. But this movie robbed him of all of that and just made him boring. Now what do you picture when you think of a holy person? Is it the Eddie Murphy type who is somehow separated from real life? Maybe you imagine Gandhi as the holy man. He's wearing robes. He's withdrawn from life. Maybe it's boring. And maybe for us it's unattainable.

You know, that holy man living is not for us. Maybe you've met a person who's got a holier-than-thou attitude. You know, the person who looks down their nose on everybody else.

[1 : 06] They seem to hold the moral high ground. You know, we tend to pull back from people like this because they seem to like the sound of their own voice and they don't see their own problems.

From an Eastern perspective, it might actually be the Confucian nobleman. One, a person who has gone on a journey of enlightenment.

Who acts in proper conduct in public and to their family. They're respectful to parents and they're superior. And they're a person of great learning. Now these are all different views of holy people. And they can seem very distant from regular folk. And being holy can seem very far away. The Bible says that God calls us to be like Him.

To be holy. To be like Jesus. But pursuing holiness can seem like just something that is not for us. I'm sure you know the feeling that you have when you get stuck in a cycle of sin.

[2 : 13] You do the wrong thing. You feel guilty. You get convicted. And so you try harder. And you sin again. And you feel guilty. And you try harder. And eventually you just give up because it's all too hard.

And so even the thought of pursuing some kind of view of holiness can feel very distant and far away. And something for other people. That's something for people who've chosen to put on robes. To choose to live a life of that. They're going to pursue that. And that is for other people. We are in the very middle of our vision series. A series where we want to see what God is doing in us and through us.

And see what God is going to be doing in and through us over the next five years. And we've been seeing who God is making us to be as disciples.

To be people who are following Jesus. In the first week we saw that God has given us the resource of his word and prayer so we can be in relationship. He's given us the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 11] And last week we saw the value of church. Brothers and sisters in arms following Jesus together. And I must say it's been wonderful singing with you brothers and sisters today already.

Today we begin to see what followers of Jesus look like. The characteristics of disciples. Today we're going to see that a Christian is holy.

And we're going to seek to understand what it means to be holy. Why we should be holy and how. Now holiness is not just about the clothes we wear. Whether it's robes.

Or whether we spout wisdom. But holiness is a gift that we have now. That we can pursue. And the challenge for us today will be to see how God wants each of us to be pursuing holiness.

So as we jump into God's word and to see what he has to say for us today let me pray for us. Dear Heavenly Father we thank you so much for who you are and for who you are making us to be.

[4 : 16] Lord thinking about holiness can feel very far away. Help us as we consider your plans for us today. Amen. Amen. So please have your Bibles open.

We're going to jump around a couple of different parts of the Bible. Have your phones out. They're nice and fast as well. And we're going to be spending a little bit of time in Colossians 3 later. But we're going to be jumping around.

Now if you don't have a Bible and would like one. We would love you to have one. There are Bibles on the sides. Brown Bibles. Take those. Write your name in that. Bring that back next week so you can highlight and underline things.

In Isaiah chapter 6 verse 3 it describes who our God is. It says holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.

That description of holy is used three times. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. When a description is used three times it is an over the top description. It's to express that something is phenomenally over the top.

[5 : 22] And so God is holy, holy, holy. God is holy and we are not. And this is the central divide between us and him.

The word holy has a concept of being separate. And so God is separate from us. He is always good and perfect and just.

Yet we are not. We are not good and we are not perfect and we are not just. God is only good and because we are not, we can't even stand in his presence.

Because he is so good and we are so sinful. And so in the Old Testament, when the high priest would enter into the temple and enter into a place called the Holy of Holies.

Which the high priest could only do once a year. It was the place where God himself dwelt. And so when the high priest entered into this place, he had to carry in an offering for his sin.

[6 : 23] He had to carry in blood for himself and for the nation. Otherwise he would be struck down because he was in the presence of a holy God. God is so good and just that sinful man cannot even stand before him.

And so when Jesus comes, he is the holy God in flesh. He comes so God would work out his plan to deal with this separation problem.

So that we would be like he is. So that we would be holy. In Leviticus it says, be holy like I am holy. And Jesus calls us to do the same thing in Matthew 5. Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. And so God calls us to be like him.

He calls us to be perfect. He calls us to be holy. But the wonderful truth is, he has already made us holy. In Colossians 3, 12 it says, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved.

[7 : 37] God has chosen us and he has already made us holy. He is making us holy, but he has already made us holy.

He has made us holy. He has made us holy. He has made us holy. He has made us holy. He has set us apart as his church. And we are special to God. This is a concept that always blows my mind. That we, for some reason, are special to God. He dearly loves us. And he has made us holy. And he does this in two ways. The first is the work of justification.

Because of the death of Jesus in our place, we can stand before God. When he looks at us now, he sees that we have been made clean by Jesus' blood.

Made pure and holy now. So that's the first work. God sees us pure because of the work of Jesus. And that's called justification. The second work I'd like to call holification.

[8 : 38] But that's not a word. So we'll go with the official word, which is sanctification. It is the process of being made holy. And so in 1 Thessalonians 4, it says that it is God's will that you would be sanctified.

It is this process of day by day making us like his son. Shaping us in the image of Jesus. So justification is God declaring that a sinner is righteous.

You are righteous because of the work of Jesus. Sanctification is God's process of transforming a believer to be who they already are. In mind, in will, in behavior, in affections, in loves.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit. God's plan is to make us holy. And he does that through justifying us and through the process of sanctifying us.

He is making us who we already are. Now, if you don't know this, Jesus, this is really wonderful news. Because this is not something that we do.

[9 : 49] This is something that is done for us. And that's something we get to do with God. He justifies us. And he is sanctifying us. And we get to be part of that. And so if you don't know this, Jesus, this is really wonderful news.

So Christians are holy but are also being made holy. Holiness is being one mind with God. Loving what he loves. Hating what he hates.

Working to put off sin and to put on love of God and obedience of his commands. It is giving sacrificially instead of hoarding for ourselves.

It is of humility. Lowliness of mind. Thinking others are better than ourselves. I became a Christian about 20 years ago.

And when I first became a Christian, there was so much excitement. I still remember the moment when I went and told my dad that I had become a Christian. And I wanted with all of my energy, with all of my zeal, to live for God.

[10:54] I wanted to obey him. I wanted to act like Jesus. I used to wear one of those what would Jesus do bracelets. Does anybody remember those? Yeah. All of the people nodding are of similar vintage to me.

That's wonderful. I would wear one of those. WWJD. What would Jesus do? To remind me, what would Jesus do in this situation? It was a Christian. But over time, the call to pursue holiness feels like it turned from joy to drudgery.

Following God's command started to feel like a burden instead of a blessing. Sometimes it started to feel like I've got a stark choice before me.

Do I obey God's command to pursue holiness? Or do I choose my own happiness in this moment? Do I do the thing that I think will make me happy?

Or do I do what God says, and I know that it will bring me happiness? But do you know what? I want to choose the thing that will give me the short-term happiness. Sin feels like such a part of me, and I don't necessarily want to get rid of it.

[12:05] I just want to make my life easier to deal with. There's a quote from Charles Spurgeon. He said that many are troubled because the gospel interferes with their sin.

And so as a Christian, I went through this journey of feeling burdened by obeying God. God makes us holy.

He calls us to pursue holiness throughout our life, to be holy like he is. But the challenge of our heart, of my heart, to pursue God and a life like Jesus' can feel burdened.

It can feel impossible. Maybe we see those stereotypes of a holy person and think, I don't want to be like that person. They're so separated from life.

Or even I can't be like that person. I don't have the time to devote to that kind of pursuit of holiness. The hole in our holiness is that we just don't care about it.

[13:11] In the Christian world, I don't see too many people doing passionate calls to be holy. We talk about sin, stop sinning, do these good things instead.

But holiness is not just about doing good things. It's not being a better person. It's about becoming God's version, God's person. And so we can see this picture of God calling us to be holy.

But why? Why should we pursue holiness? This is the, I'm going to put it out there that pursuing holiness is God's plan for us for human flourishing.

Holiness is God's plan for us. Now, I'm a pretty bad handyman when it comes to doing things around the house. And if I need to go and get a screwdriver and I'm already in the kitchen, can you guess what tool I'm going to use instead?

Instead, it's going to be a knife because it's pretty similar, right? And I'll just get a knife from the drawer and make do. But when I go to the effort of getting the tool that was designed for the task, it just sings.

[14:27] It's just like the screwdriver just drives that screw home so effortlessly compared to stabbing at it with a knife and trying to get it. But the reality is I end up blunting the knife. And the screw was ruined.

We blunt ourselves pursuing the wrong things and living the wrong way. Pursuing holiness is how God has made us to be, to be like him.

It is being who we are and who we are made to be. We were damaged in the Garden of Eden, restored in the resurrection of Jesus. And God has made us like Jesus and caused us to pursue being like him.

And it can feel like a burden. In Leviticus chapter 9, God's people have come out of Egypt. God has saved them. And all of God's people are gathered to praise God.

It says in chapter 9, verse 23, Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all of the people.

[15 : 33] Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down.

God's people have been saved. And God has appeared in their midst. He has accepted their sin offering. Their sin has been taken away.

And they respond to God with joy. Absolute joy. Similarly, as Kel read for us in John, when Jesus' disciples are locked up because Jesus has been killed, they are fearful of the Jews coming to kill them as well.

Jesus appears to them, resurrected. They see him and they respond with joy. We seem to have to choose between the impossible, undesirable, boring pursuit of being holy and happiness through depravity and chasing our own sin.

This is a lie. If we believe the lie that says pursuing holiness means there is no happiness, it's going to be an uphill battle. The life of a Christian is going to be hard because being made like Jesus is going to feel hard for us.

[16 : 56] And there's going to be no amount of self-control that can keep us from seeking happiness. What's going to happen is we're going to fail. We'll beat ourselves up. We'll try harder.

We'll do things that we've been encouraging. We'll try to read the Bible four or more times a week. Do that anyway. But when we fail, it's going to feel worse. We'll have good accountability. We'll walk closely with other Christians.

And we'll fail. And we'll fall. And we can become despondent, depressed. Because often we are just using the lever of self-control.

Self-control is not the way we pursue holiness long-term. It might work in the short-term. If I'm trying to particularly change a sinful behavior, holiness might work in the short-term.

But pursuing holiness and using the lever of self-control, choosing to not do things, choosing not to be happy.

[17 : 55] Maybe I'm going to separate myself from life. I'm going to go and be that monastic monk. And I'm going to live in a cave. Then I can be like Jesus. And then I can get rid of my sin. That is not a path to pursuing holiness long-term.

It doesn't work. Satan tries to rig the game by convincing us that pursuing holiness, pursuing being like Christ, Christ makes dull and boring Christians.

Pursuing holiness in life is not about saying no to things. It's about saying yes to something that is better. Pursuing holiness for us is a reorientation of our loves.

If you've ever tried to change what you eat or read about dieting, it's the same kind of concept. It's really hard to say no to all of the delicious foods that you love and are unhealthy.

And for me, this is really hard because I've got a sweet tooth and a savory tooth. And is butter another type of tooth? Is that another thing?

[19 : 00] Carbs? Like I've got all of the teeth. All of the types of food teeth. I've got them all. I love them all. But it doesn't work to just say no to the things that you want to pursue.

From what I've read, a diet is much more likely to work if you say no to some things but also say yes, have a clear yes. I'm going to eat these things instead.

Pursuing holiness is similar. It's not just about saying no to sin and saying no to the things, the parts of us that are sinful and that we think will make us happy.

It's not just about saying no to those things. We must say yes to the true happiness that God has for us. So our mouths might be tempted to spread gossip, to feel important and valued.

We have to say no to that. But we also have to say yes to reminding ourselves that we are valued by someone greater. We are valued by God himself.

[20 : 05] We need to say no to lies that protect ourselves for a moment and say yes to loving people with truthful words. Does retail therapy bring a measure of happiness?

Say no to a temporary happiness that leaves us feeling flat and yes to pursuing a God who has given us every blessing in Jesus. Lust and chasing someone for a couple of extra seconds as they walk past as a little taste of happiness.

Say no to that little taste and yes to pursuing a God who has made our bodies and he has made beauty and honor him with our whole body.

Pursuing holiness doesn't mean ignoring joy and happiness but following the God who made joy and happiness because we've been created to treasure Jesus with our hearts and to see the blessings that God has given us.

Lust is the love of beauty and desire for sexual intimacy in the wrong place. Impatience is the love of order and timeliness over people.

[21 : 24] Consumerism is the love of the created thing over the creator. Gossip and slander are the love of self over the love of other people. And so we have an option.

Do we say no to the things that will give us a temporary sinful burst of happiness or do we say yes to the God who offers us a greater happiness?

Over the last week, I've been thinking about my own pursuit of holiness. One of my challenges is my desire for control.

And I get frustrated and impatient when people don't do what I want them to do. Particularly my kids. I get frustrated when they don't do what I expect them to do.

And so happiness in this concept is very sinful. Do what I want. But true happiness for me is to remember that I am not in control.

[22 : 23] That there is a God who is in control of all things. And for him, I definitely take too long to do what he wants me to do. And yet he is quick to patience and quick to forgive.

And I am slow to patience and slow to forgive. And so for me, the path to holiness that I am pursuing is to acknowledge that God is in control. And it's not just saying to myself, oh, you know, these kids are doing the wrong thing and I need to go harder at them.

No, no, no. It is saying yes to a greater love for my kids. Knowing who God has, what God has done for me and who he is making me to be.

Lastly today, how do we pursue this holiness? God has justified us. He has made us holy and he is making us holy. He is sanctifying us.

And so Paul in Colossians 3, which was read for us, has two lists. Things to say no to and things to say yes to. Things to put off and things to put on.

[23 : 35] Just another reminder, we pursue holiness because God has already made us holy. So have a look at Colossians 3, verse 5. There's one of these lists for us.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Put them to death. Don't allow them to continue. The list continues in verse 8. But now you must also read yourself of all such things as these. Anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language from your lips.

Kill them dead. I've been trying to put to death the clover in my front yard for a couple of years now. It requires persistence, hard work, and if I slack off, it comes back very quickly and aggressively.

Sin is much more deeply rooted in my heart and your hearts than any plant. And we're called not to just prune it, but to make it look acceptable to people so that we can survive doing what we want to do.

[24 : 48] But we are called to kill our sin. And to do this, I really appreciate John Piper. He has a really helpful acrostic to help us kill our sin dead.

So imagine for me a sin you've been struggling with. I've got a whole list of mine. Have a look at that list in Colossians 3. Pick a sin that you're struggling with. If you can't think of one, ask the person sitting next to you, what's a sin I need to work on?

And as you picture that, John Piper has a helpful acronym for us. It is ANTHEM. Anthem.

A-N-T-H-E-M.

First of all, avoid. Don't put yourself in a situation that will encourage you to sin. Secondly, say no.

Say no in the first five seconds. I know when I'm faced with a temptation, whether it's to sin or to eat a donut, if I dwell on it longer, I am more likely to do it.

[25 : 51] Say no in the first five seconds. Turn. Turn away from the sinful, fallen thing and turn to what God's plan is for you in that moment.

Turn away from the no to the yes of God's purpose for true happiness. H, hold. Just hold on to that yes for a moment and then enjoy God's promises.

Finally, move. Actually, move away. Do something else. Put a song on. Praise God. Pray. Do something to move. And so, for me, my sin of frustration which comes out of my kids, well, first of all, I can't avoid them.

That one's a bit hard. But I can do the right thing to be more patient in the moment. So, for me, that means going to bed earlier than the night before. To be a dad who slept well.

And then, in those first five seconds when there's a moment of, you know, the kids being kids and I feel my frustrations boiling up like a kettle, I say no to that.

[27 : 05] And not just clamp the lid on and so the kettle will burst later at the dog or at my wife or whatever it is. Instead of just putting that frustration to one side, turn and put on patience.

Remind myself of how patient God has been in my frustration. Put on true happiness in that moment. Turn.

For me, that turn looks like changing my tone of voice. And hold onto that. This happened to me the other day. And in the moment of frustration, I, this, this word came to mind.

I turned from the frustration. I held onto it. And in that moment, I realized, oh God, you are so good.

And I just had a very brief moment of praising God because he had given me patience and love where moments before I was frustrated and frustration and anger was about to boil out of me.

Enjoy that moment. Thanks be to God for his love and patience for me. And then get moving.

Change that situation. Praise God. I think anthem is a very helpful reminder and a helpful practice for us to put on holiness in the moment.

[28 : 24] To not put on sin, but to put on holiness. Because verse 12 reminds us of Colossians 3 that we are already dearly loved. This is who we are to be.

And it's the motivation for putting on these things. So first, from Colossians 3 chapter 12, these are the yeses. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

That acronym anthem is really helpful in a moment of temptation to help us to put off and to put on these things which Paul has said, God's plan for us for true happiness.

Kevin DeYoung is a pastor and author from the US and he has a wonderful process of working through holiness for his whole self. He also has seven children, so I want to listen to what this guy has to say.

[29 : 34] When he does this, he regularly brings himself before God and he's got a practice of checking where his holiness is at. He works through his whole body. And so he starts with his mind.

Is it filled with the knowledge of God or am I filling my mind with other things? His eyes, our eyes, do our eyes turn away from lust and evil acts?

Do they turn away from bullying or are they dragged towards them? Our mouths, do our mouths speak out of love or out of slander and gossip? Our souls, are they resting and trusting in God or are they full of anxiety?

Our shoulders, are they burdened with the world or are they living each day knowing that God is in control? Our hearts, are they joyfully treasuring Jesus or are they full of pride and envy?

Our sexual organs, are they pure and reserved for marriage between a man and a woman? Our hands, are they quick to help and quick to fold in prayer?

[30 : 44] And our feet, do our feet quickly move towards people in love or are they moving towards people in senseless conflict? This body, again, two practices, use anthem in the moment to put on love and patience and forgiveness and the concept of thinking about ourselves as a whole person.

Work through yourself to bring yourself before God, to ask him, God, how do I need to be pursuing holiness today? The reason we exist as a church is to be treasuring our Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all people.

We treasure Jesus. He's the ultimate treasure and he shows us how to have a life that is full of joy. Pursuing holiness and treasuring Jesus is the key to who we want to be as a church, who we want to be becoming over the next five years.

In your follow 25 booklets, if you don't have one of these, if you had one and don't know where it is, grab another one there on the table outside. In the center of this is the key to who we want to be as a church, right here, which says that we want to see 65% of our church identifying much growth in faith.

The vast majority, 65% of us, growing much in faith through the work of this church. Growing in faith and holiness are inextricably linked.

[32 : 23] Faith is trusting in God's plan for us and pursuing holiness holiness is trusting that God has a plan for us, that he knows better for our lives than what I choose.

Because that's all holiness is. Doing what God has set out for me because it is the best thing. Pursuing holiness and God's design is a big step of faith.

When we do that, our faith and our trust in God will grow moment by moment, day by day. Pursuing holiness is something that each of us can do because God has already made us holy.

And we should do it because it is the way we can have greatest happiness. It is the way that God has designed us as his people. Let me pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for how much you love us.

That not only have you made us holy through the blood of Jesus, but you are making us holy. You are making us like you bit by bit and day by day.

[33 : 39] Lord, pursuing holiness can feel hard and distant. Lord, remind us of its goodness. Thank you for practical helps to do it.

But Lord, this week, as we head out into weeks full of busyness, challenges at work and challenges at home, kids, colleagues, all of these things, Lord, a life that is full of problems before us.

Help us to put off sin and to put on love for others and love for you as you have designed us, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name and all for your glory.

Amen.