

# ① PURSUING HOLINESS

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Every successful person sets goals. Whether in business, sports, or ministry, someone who has reached the next level has determined to get there. It's the same in your spiritual journey with God.

You began your journey:

- You saw your need (Rom. 7:18-20).
- You trusted God to give you a new start (2 Cor. 5:17).
- You confessed your sinful disobedience against His will and His Word (1 John 1:9).
- You prayed and invited God's only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into your life (Rev. 3:20).
- You believed that He forgave you of your past (Rom. 10:9-10).
- You promised to live a new life of faith in Him (Gal. 2:20).
- You set out to do *what it takes* to be *what He wants you to be* (Phil. 3:11-12).

## 1. GROWING

The New Testament writer Peter suggests that you keep *going* by *growing*: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Do you see the two components of that growth? First, “grow in the grace.” Your spiritual growth comes from the strength, direction, and affirmation God gives to you. “Grace” means that it is a gift. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. You rely on God for it. God simply gives you the supplies to be more like Him, upon your request.

## 2. LEARNING

The second component describes your part: to grow in “the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” How do you grow in knowledge? You discipline yourself to study and to put into practice what you learn from His Word: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). A “workman” works. And work takes discipline: “No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops” (vv. 4-6).

## 3. PERFECTING

Each of the illustrations used by the apostle—the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer—describes someone who has a great amount of focus, dedication, and determination. They “pursue perfection.” That doesn't mean they are perfect in all of their actions; it simply means they are “perfect” in their direction and in their intention. They pursue “doing” and “being” the best they can. The soldier focuses on physical fitness, military technique, and weaponry to carry out orders from a commanding officer. The athlete focuses not only on physical fitness but also on agility and practice to push his or her body to the very limit. The farmer focuses on planting, tending, and harvesting what has been sown, using all the right tools in the process.

The soldier, the athlete, and the farmer may have every supply necessary to accomplish their tasks, but without disciplined and diligent efforts, they will fall short of their goals. What is your goal? God has already spelled it out in the Bible:

Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy” (*1 Pet. 1:13-16*).

#### 4. DEDICATION

God wants you to be spiritually complete, to be “wholly holy.” You are called to be like Him in your attitude and actions. What does that look like? It looks like the life of Jesus: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). You are a follower of Christ—a Christian (Christ-one, one of Christ’s), one who seeks to be like Him in everything you do. You are His “disciple” (learner, follower). You are dedicated to obeying Him and learning how to be like Him.

Dedication is a mark of excellence. In the sports world, for example, golfer Tiger Woods may be the greatest of all time. His long golf drives from the tee, his skill in chipping the golf ball onto the green, and his accuracy in putting that ball into the hole have made him a very successful athlete. But his skill didn’t just happen. He spent untold numbers of hours practicing. He drove golf balls on the driving range. He practiced chipping the golf ball up to the green. He learned how to line up the ball with the hole and putt with accuracy. He disciplined himself to play the game of golf—within the boundaries of the rules of golf.

You may not be the greatest golfer in the world, but you can practice like one. You can work on driving the golf ball, hitting it off the tee time after time, day after day. You can learn the “feel” of the golf club as you diligently practice the short strokes of “chipping” the ball onto the green. You can learn to line up the golf ball to putt it into the hole, and then practice putting it—hour after hour. And you can learn to live by the “rules of the game.”

Likewise, you may not be considered the greatest Christian that ever lived, but you can practice like one.

- You can discipline your mind to learn everything you can about Christ and the Bible.
- You can copy Him in your love and service to others.
- You can “line up” your heart with the principles He taught and “aim” to live by them.
- You can determine to live by the rules written in the Bible. In fact, you can be the best follower of Christ you can be!
- You can pursue holiness.

#### 5. ASSURANCE

What is involved in that pursuit? First, be certain of your salvation. When you received Christ into your heart as an act of faith, you were saved from being lost (Titus 3:5-7). You were away from God, your sin (breaking His law on purpose: “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness” [1 John 3:4]) had separated you from Him. And breaking the law meant paying the penalty: “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a). You were spiritually dead—dead to God’s will (His purpose for your life) and to the Word of God (His written rules and promises). You deserved the “wage” (penalty) of (spiritual) death. But God loved you so much He provided a way back to Him—a way of life. He paid the price for your salvation from being lost by offering His only Son, Jesus, as your representative:

“The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23*b*). It was as if a judge in a court of law had pronounced a death sentence and then was executed on behalf of the prisoner.

At the moment you told God how sorry you were for disobeying His will and His Word and asked Jesus Christ to come into your life and to be the Lord of your life (you repented; that is, you turned away from sin and to God), every act of disobedience was forgiven—and forgotten: “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 8:12).

Perhaps you’ve been in a large shopping center and suddenly realized you didn’t know where you were. And perhaps you remember looking at a sign posted that had a map on it; and on the map there was a large *X* with the words “You are here.” There are several “signs” that give you the assurance that you have been found—that you have been saved from being lost.

- *God’s promise.* God cannot lie. It is against His very character: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, *who does not lie*, promised before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:1-2, emphasis added). You can be sure that you have been saved from being lost—that you are a child of God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—because God said you are (John 1:12).
- *The Holy Spirit’s witness.* God the Holy Spirit teaches us about God the Son (John 15:1-16). He reveals Christ’s power and purpose in the Christian believer’s heart (Rom. 8:11). He also came to give us the assurance that we belong to God: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (v. 16). It is the Holy Spirit who gives you the assurance that your guilt is forgiven and that you have peace with God.
- *Fruit of the Spirit.* When you plant something—a tree or a crop, for example—you expect it to show evidence of what it is, as it grows. The Holy Spirit produces “evidence” in your life that you belong to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; that you have begun to grow in Him. That evidence is displayed in your attitude and in your actions: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23*a*). You have a new “self” inwardly that is revealed outwardly.
- *Change of direction.* Another indication that you are saved is the difference your faith has made in your life. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). Your priorities have changed. You want to be with other Christians. You have a new interest in reading the Bible. Church attendance has a new meaning. Now, prayer is more than saying grace before a meal—you want to talk with God.
- *Desire for service.* As a new “Christ-one” (Christian) you see things in a different light—God’s light: Wherever you see a need, you want to help meet the need. You want to do His work.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (*Matt. 9:35-38*).

Jesus brought that compassion with Him into your heart. You have a desire to minister to the helpless and hurting. You have a desire to share with others what God has done for you. You want to answer God’s call for “workers.” That very interest is a sign that you belong to Him.

- *Hunger for holiness.* As you learn and obey God's Word, you will soon want everything that God has to offer—and you will soon realize that God has even more for you. You will want to keep pursuing a holy life. (Remember, that is what He called you to do: 1 Pet. 1:13-16.) As you continue to pursue holiness, you will discover areas of your life that you can turn over to Him. You will even come to a point where you will make a decision to turn every area of your life over to Him (an experience subsequent to being saved, called sanctification—being “set apart” for holy use).

## 6. REACHING

As we said, as a Christian you have a goal God has given you. You are to pursue holiness. By faith, you invited Jesus to come into your life. And by faith, you can ask Him to take full control of your life. As an example, imagine that you are showing Jesus through the “home” of your heart. Imagine taking Him to every room—pointing out the things you think are of most importance. You have made Him feel welcome in your “home.”

But imagine taking that welcome a step farther. During the “tour” you discovered some things that needed fixing (e.g., you discovered rebellion, selfishness, or desires for the things of your past). Some things just didn't fit in your “home” since you have become a Christian. You need an extreme makeover. You decide the best way is not to just ask Jesus to do “repairs” but to take ownership: you decide to give Him your “home” and let Him do what needs to be done with it. The Bible tells us about that experience: “I urge you . . . in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

You are certain of your salvation, and you are certain you want everything God has to offer. You are reaching. You are obeying Him. You are surrendering to His will for your life. And you have a desire to be completely His. Congratulations! You have started on a great adventure: pursuing holiness.