



Fuel Week 2008  
Optional Pre-Week Sunday School Lesson

**Students Should**

**Learn:**

1. To define holiness—wholly.
2. Our need to be holy.
3. That when God enters our lives, our journey toward holiness is just beginning.

**Scripture Focus:**

- Genesis 1:26–27
- Leviticus 11:44–45
- Romans 3:21–24

**What You'll Need for this Lesson:**

- Bibles
- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- The movie *Saved!* and the necessary equipment to show it
- Copies of the “Discussion Questions and Questions to Ponder” sidebar
- Whiteboard and/or poster board
- Markers

# Holy Cow, Holier than Thou, Holy Now?

**Lesson Background:**

The saints proclaim 24/7 the holiness of God in the throne room scene in the Book of Revelation (4:1–11). This scene in John’s vision is more than a contemporary praise service such as Chris Tomlin might do. It reminds us of everything that James Hampton teaches us in his book *Everyday Saint: Rejecting Sin, Choosing Love*. It is when we join the saints in proclaiming God’s holiness 24/7 through our lives that God’s sanctifying grace brings us to completion. You, I, and the youth who make up our ministries often live lives far from the throne room of God. But can we be holy? What is *holiness*? How do we live our lives in a holy way without coming across as “Holier than Thou”? These are all essential questions to our journey of faith. As you prepare for this lesson, I hope that you will take the time to read the introduction and chapter 1 of *Everyday Saint: Rejecting Sin, Choosing Love*.

Often when I am teaching youth about holiness and our need for God’s grace, I will raise the question, “Are you a good person?” Almost every student or adult in the room will claim that he or she is a good person or is at least *trying* to be a good person. Of course, just as with our theology and politics, we often see ourselves somewhere in the middle; we are better than some (so we must be doing OK) and not as good as others. But when I raise the question, “Are you a *holy* person?”, that stirs up all kinds of doubts. It causes youth and adults alike to wonder: Is it even possible for someone to be holy? God alone is holy, right? How would someone even try to attain this? Why would someone even *want* to be holy? The room always goes quiet and introspective when I ask that one.

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James Hampton is right—the church has got to do a better job of teaching our youth what holiness is and showing them how it affects their lives. It is in allowing God to make us holy that we experience all that God has for us in this life.

When I was 12, I asked Jesus to be Lord and Savior of my life; I claimed for myself the faith that my parents had taught me. I was overwhelmed by God’s love for me through the passion of the Cross and knew that the only thing I could do in response was to give my life to God. Over the next seven years I knew God and at times sought to follow Him, but I was very susceptible to the adolescent need to fit in. Often I would knowingly choose to live in the world in order to feel accepted. During this part of my journey, I would run to God and Jesus when I needed a Savior, but I had not truly surrendered lordship of my life to Christ. God continued to work in my life (sanctifying me even when I was unaware); it was at the age of 19, still caught in the midst of this struggle, that I heard God’s call upon my life. At this point, I began the daily battle to allow Christ lordship over my life. Some days I was faithful, and others I reverted back to my sinful desire to control my own life. I mark this point in time on my spiritual journey because it was then that I became intentional about trying to become Christlike; like Paul I began to press toward the goal of my heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

James Hampton defines holiness as Christlikeness. Youth today are dying (spiritually) for someone to show them a life worth living and what it means to be Christlike. The church’s spiritual holiness theology has become holey at best. Will we be good people who claim Christ as our Savior only—or will we be, as Chris Tomlin proclaims, “wholly (holy) yours?”

If we are going to help our youth embrace holiness, we must help them get rid of their misconceptions and develop their understanding. Here are some common youthful interpretations and misconceptions of what holiness is from the introduction to *Everyday Saint* (pg. 9):

- “The ‘holy people’ I’ve met seem to have no joy. They are people who walk around looking like their best friend just died. Why would I want to be like that?” – Omar, age 20.
- “Holiness? Doesn’t that mean you never have any fun?” – Lucy, age 13.
- “It means obeying the 10 commandments, going to church, reading your Bible, doing daily devotions, praying, and being a good influence on others.” – Kristen, age 13.
- “I think it means you have to be perfect . . . which leaves me out!” – Marissa, age 21
- “My pastor told me it was all about being perfect, and that once I was sanctified, I’d never have to deal with sin again. To tell you the truth, I just can’t buy into that. I mean, have

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you ever met someone who didn't sin anymore? It seems like an impossible thing to me." – Jordan, age 18.

- "Aren't people who are holy kind of stuck up? They act all 'holier-than-thou' as if they were better than me." – Joaquin, age 16
- "Is it possible to be holy? I don't know. I don't often feel very holy. More times than I can count I find myself being tempted by things around me, so I know that I must not be holy. I guess it works for others, but I'm just not sure that I can be holy." – Juanita, age 20.

Holiness is a gift from God, and it is God's intention for us to be holy as He is holy. During this lesson we will look at three scripture passages that will help us understand how we can be holy:

- **Genesis 1:26–27**—"Then God said, 'Let us make [human beings] in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created [human beings] in his own image, in the image of God he created [them]; male and female he created them."

God's intention for us to be holy as He is holy begins with our understanding that we have been created in the image of God. God did not breathe the breath of life into or create anything else in His image. God gave *us* life—and it is only in God that we find life. We have been stamped with our creator's image. From our conception, some of our DNA is Godlike; it is that DNA that longs to be united with our creator. Youth need to understand that the God who is holy created them to be holy.

- **Leviticus 11:44–45**—"I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.... I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy."

God is holy, and God's desire is for us to be holy. Why? Because it is who we were created to be. God created us to live in relationship with Him; however, He also loved us enough to give us free will, so we get to choose whether we want to live apart from God and experience death or live in relationship with Him and experience life.

- **Romans 3:21–24**—"Now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known. . . . This righteousness (holiness) from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Righteousness and holiness are so closely related that I cannot begin to separate them. God is holy and therefore righteous, and God could not be holy without being righteous. Therefore, I have inserted holiness in parenthesis to help this scripture come to light. Paul told it plainly. We

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all stand in need of God's grace; our righteousness (holiness) comes from God through our faith in Jesus Christ. God gives us this gift freely through Christ, justifying us and restoring us to our proper relationship with God. Christ becomes the bridge over the sin that separated us from God so that we can re-enter God's presence.

When we believe in Christ our holiness is restored, but it is just the beginning. We have not become perfect, but we have been *introduced* to perfection. As we study, learn, and practice Christ's holiness, we become more Christlike—which leads us to become who God originally intended us to be.

Holiness is not "I'm better than you." Rather the journey toward Christ acknowledges that we are all "works in progress" as we seek to allow our maker to shape us and mold us. Through Christ we have access to His holiness which allows us to emulate and imitate Him. Being Christlike is never about saying "I'm better than you;" it's about saying "I love you."

## The Lesson

### Introduction

#### Option 1: Holy Skits

Divide your group into small groups (no more than 3-4 people per group) and give each group a slip of paper with one of the following on it:

- *Holier than thou.*
- *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty (Revelation 4).*
- *Be holy as the Lord your God is holy (Leviticus 11: 44–45).*
- *Made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27).*

Give the groups five minutes or so to make up short skits presenting their topics; then allow each group time to perform the skit. When each group is finished, discuss these questions:

- **How was holiness presented in these skits?**
- **What are some common misconceptions about holiness? What does it mean to be "holier than thou"?**
- **Do you think we can be holy like God?**

When you are ready to move on, say, **God desires for us to be holy. However, if we are going to be holy, we need to know what it means and how God has made it possible for us to become that way.**

#### Option 2: Saved

Begin by saying, **Today we're going to discover what it means to be holy. As we begin this lesson, I want us to look at a movie clip.** The movie *Saved!* has many potential clips of the main character being "holier than thou." If you choose this option you will be showing what holiness is *not* to help students see what holiness really is. Feel free to pick your own clip; one good

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possible “over the top” moment is when Hillary (the main character) tries to perform an exorcism on Mary. (Be sure to preview any clip or scene for appropriateness before showing it to your students.) When the clip is finished, discuss the following questions:

- **Is this what you think about when you think about holiness?**
- **Is this your impression of how holy people live? How do holy people live?**
- **What makes someone holy?**

Some students may get really caught up in poking fun at “holier than thou” people. Move on by saying, **We aren’t called to be “holier than thou”—we’re called to be “holy as God is holy.” We’ve just seen what holiness is not; now let’s figure out what God really intends for us.**

### **Dig In**

#### **Read the Word**

Distribute paper and pens or pencils and ask students to draw a line down the middle of their papers. They should write *IS* on one side and *NOT* on the other side; then they should think of and record words, ideas, and definitions of what holiness *IS* and words, ideas, and impressions of what holiness is *NOT*. Encourage students by saying, **If you agree that God is holy, then write down some of the characteristics of God that make God holy.** Give students three to five minutes to write their responses and then have them share them. You might write them on the board or a poster sheet if you want to or have time. If you have a large group, students can share in smaller groups of 5–6 with a leader.

After everyone has had a chance to share, read these examples from *Everyday Saint* (pp. 15–16) of how others have defined *holiness*:

Holiness is . . .

- “to live like Christ—a life of self-sacrificing love.” – Eric, a teenager
- “being baptized by the Holy Spirit, who then lives in our hearts.” – Jazmine, a teenager
- “living together with other Christians as we seek to live out what it means to be part of the kingdom of God on earth.” – Rudy, a teenager
- “to be set apart for God and His work, to be cleansed of all sin, to be perfect, and to avoid sin from here on out—but the most fundamental meaning is love.” – Tom, a professor
- “the reflection of God’s own character.” – Wes, a pastor
- “loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.” – Deirdre, a pastor
- “Holiness is the place where love and justice meet.” – Ruth Anne, a professor
- “giving control over every aspect of my life to God and letting Him be in charge. Some people call this ‘dying out to

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self.” – Troy, a youth pastor

Now give everyone a couple of minutes to write their personal definitions of *holiness*. Invite a few students to share their definitions, then say, **Here’s a simple definition I want to propose: Holiness is Christlikeness. So are you holy? Do you have the characteristics that you described? Can we ever hope to be holy? Can we be like Christ? Let’s look at a few scripture passages that can teach us about holiness.**

Ask a student to read Genesis 1:26–27. Then say in your own words, **We are created in the image of God. We are the only things that God breathed His Spirit and life into and made in His image. That means that within our DNA, within our personality, exist the very traits of God.** Have youth take a couple of minutes to look back over their lists of what holiness IS (God’s characteristics) and is NOT. Have them circle the characteristics of God that they recognize in their own lives. With older groups you might have them also circle things from the NOT list as well. Say, **When you were conceived your Creator stamped His image upon your soul. Within each of us are the characteristics of God. Because God is holy, He created us to be holy as well so that we can have a relationship with Him.**

Now read Leviticus 11:44–45. Emphasize the last phrase—“Therefore be holy, because I am holy.” Have students discuss in small groups or as a whole group the following questions:

- **Why does this passage say we should be holy? What does that mean?**
- **Why would God want us to be holy as He is holy?**
- **If God is holy, do we *have* to be holy to have a relationship with Him? Would God ever allow *unholiness* to be in relationship with Him?**

After discussing these questions, say, **God created and calls us to be holy. When sin entered our lives we became separated from God. We made a choice to do our own thing and our relationship with God was changed. God continued to pursue us because He desires a relationship with us, but we needed a way to be renewed, to become holy again so that we can be in God’s presence. So, God sent Jesus....**

### Wrap Up

Continue by saying, **We all desire to be in a relationship with God, so let’s look at how God made this possible through Jesus.** Have a student read Romans 3:21–24. Then discuss the following questions:

- **How are righteousness and holiness related? Can you have one without the other?** (Have a student re-read the passage, replacing *righteousness* with *holiness*. Discuss.)
- **Where does our holiness come from?** (From faith in

## Questions to Ponder

Think about these questions as you go out into the world:

- What does it mean to me to be created in God's holy image?
- Can only holy people be in a relationship with God?
- If I believe in Christ and Christ has restored my relationship with God, then I must be holy. What difference does that make in how I live my life?
- I am called to be holy and Christlike. How am I actually becoming like Christ?

Christ.)

- **Why did Paul say we need holiness?** (Because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.)
- **What does holiness cost us?** (Nothing; it's a gift of God.)
- **How does Christ restore our holiness?** (There are many good possible answers here: He removes our sins, He justifies us, He creates a bridge that allows us to have a relationship with God again.)

After giving time for discussion, say, **I ask you again—are you Holy? YES! Christ has *made* you holy. We have not been made perfect like Christ, but we have *encountered* perfection and God is beginning to shape us into the likeness of Christ.** Explain that if we wanted to be like a famous athlete such as Tiger Woods or Lebron James we would imitate and emulate those people. We would watch them and, if given the chance, spend time with them. We would do the things they do so that we could become like them. But just because we knew who they were, or what they did, it would not make us them. Being holy is much the same. Holiness, we said, is becoming Christlike. We will not be made Christlike in a day. When we believe in Christ's sacrificial gift and receive God's grace, we begin the process of becoming holy. Christ restores our relationship with God so that we can re-enter God's presence through a relationship with Him and experience holiness. Then, our lives begin to be transformed, to be more like Christ. Holiness is a process. It is an active faith. It is like morphing from an old creation into a new one. We have become a new creation, but the creator God will *continue* to create in us until we are like Christ: Christ-ian.

## Closing

Close in prayer. Thank God for being a holy God, for placing His image in us, and for making it possible through Christ to be restored to holiness so that we can have a relationship with God. Invite God to make each of us more like Christ. You can also use the following prayer:

**Holy God, You are worthy of all honor, glory, and praise. We are overwhelmed by Your love for us, that You would place within us Your image, that You would allow us to choose our own way and to make mistakes, that You would continue to pursue us and provide us through Christ a way to be restored to holiness so that we can have a relationship with You. Creator God, we want to be holy as You are holy. Make us more like Your Son; make us into the likeness of Christ. And may You be glorified as others see Your holiness through the way we live out our lives. Amen.**