

Essential Holiness

Holiness is essential. The essence of holy living is Christlikeness. Christians are to reflect the image and be the reputation of Christ, who is the embodiment of holiness. Christ did not choose holiness as an option. It was and is an absolute requisite of His nature as the third person of the triune Godhead.

Christ could not be the Son of our Holy God and live in any manner that would contradict the holiness of His Heavenly Father. In order for us to be authentic representatives of Christ, it is necessary for us to constantly pursue and maintain a holy lifestyle. It is not optional. We are to be Christ's disciples, reflecting His holiness in word, thought, and deed. We are to be holy disciples.

Holiness and Perfection

Holiness, in its purest state, is perfection. Only God is absolute and pure perfection, absolutely perfect in holiness. So when we attempt to describe holiness as it relates to human beings, it is necessary for us to distinguish between absolute holiness or perfection, which is ascribed solely to God, and relative perfection, which is ascribed to us as God's own creation.

Doing vs. Being

We can never achieve holiness equal to that of God's holiness. Yet, we are challenged by the broader, more inclusive meaning of God's instruction in Leviticus 11:44-46: "Be holy, because I am holy" (a command given twice in these verses!). In its narrower sense, the 11th chapter of Leviticus deals with culinary and other laws regarding what is clean and unclean. However, in its broader, more inclusive sense, this chapter deals with the whole Hebrew idea of interaction and relationship with a holy God.

All of life is to be considered sacred and a holy offering to God. "What shall I *do* to be clean and holy before God?" In other words, what action must be taken to live a holy life, one pleasing to God? One rule led to another, and then another, until, consequently, the Jewish religious leaders felt it necessary to make rules to govern everything imaginable.

Responding in keeping with his Hebrew heritage, the rich young man in Matthew 19 asked Jesus what good deed he must do to inherit eternal life. He had obeyed (done) all the commandments (rules), yet he felt there was something more he needed to do.

Jesus told him that to be perfect and have treasure in heaven, he should invest the sum of his wealth to benefit the poor, and devote his life to following Jesus. In contrast to the young man's conviction that he needed to be *doing* something, the Christian perception of the holy life is a matter of *believing*. The young man would have to move through the *doing* mode to a *believing* mode. Only in this way could Christ be established as his Lord and Master. That's precisely what the holy life is all about—Christ being both Lord and Master.

The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas the question, "Sirs, what must I *do* to be saved?" (Acts 16:30, emphasis added). Paul and Silas gave him the Christian-based answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be

saved" (v. 31, emphasis added). The audience hearing Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), meaning, "What duty can we perform or ritual can we practice in order to gain eternal life?" Peter's response was, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Repentance and baptism are responses of faith. To be sure, repentance and baptism are actions, but they are only meaningful when they are preceded and followed by faith, that is, faith in the atoning blood of the risen Lord to forgive sins, cleanse and empower a consecrated life, and perpetuate holy living.

Challenge to Holy Living

We have so far pursued a rather rational, historical description of holiness. Our study in this unit on holiness, however, attempts to move us toward a scriptural basis for what Wesleyan Christians have come to understand as holiness of heart and life—a holy lifestyle that is biblical, necessary, and practical.

Just as the word "essential" qualifies or describes "holiness," so the word "Christian" qualifies or describes "perfection." The doctrine of entire sanctification was defined by John Wesley as Christian perfection. Wesley's term, "Christian perfection," was based on Christ's response to a young inquiring mind in search of the most important commandment. Scripture records Jesus' answer: "The most important [commandment] . . . is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31; see also Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18). This, then, is Wesley's core view of Christian perfection, or entire sanctification: ***To love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one's neighbor as one's self.***

The Scripture selections for this unit deal with the practical aspects of holy living (Christian perfection). These are reflected in the session content: the necessity of holiness; the life of holiness made possible by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; the quest for purity of heart and the discipline of maintaining a holy life in the community of holy people; the encountering of unholy moments or issues causing a break in covenant with God; and the power for holy living.

For a personal and/or group challenge, at the outset of this unit, compile a list of all the scripture passages contained in each session, carefully gleaning the operative and definitive words and phrases pertaining to the holiness lifestyle. Then write a short sentence or two describing how each Scripture selection pertains to the life of holiness.

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ACTION GOAL FOR UNIT 2

Drawing Near to God

April 26—May 31, 2009

The Joy of His Presence

An overseas mission trip had taken John Huffman away from home for several weeks. On the day of his return when the airplane landed, he could hardly wait for the reunion with his wife and four children. But he did wait. He and the other passengers were detained in customs for two hours. When they were finally released by the customs officials to proceed to the airport lobby, they found hundreds of people anxiously waiting. There was such a crowd Huffman realized he would not be able to find his family until he walked up the ramp into the open. Huffman tells what happened:

“My three-year-old daughter, who had managed to squeeze her way to the front of the crowd, began screaming at the top of her lungs, ‘Daddy! Daddy! That’s my daddy!’ She must have shouted that at least five times when suddenly she broke free from the crowd and bolted past the security guards, still yelling, ‘Daddy! Daddy! That’s my daddy!’ She literally flew into my arms and began kissing and hugging me. What a welcome! I have never felt so loved and acknowledged in my life.”

Huffman’s three-year-old daughter knew how to express the joy of being in her father’s presence. Having described how his daughter’s greeting made him feel, John Huffman said, “That is what God feels like when we acknowledge him in worship” (Huffman, “Marketplace Christianity,” *World Christian*, July/August 1994, 25).

The Worth-ship of God

When was the last time that your experience of wor-

ship was like the homecoming celebrated by John Huffman’s three-year-old daughter?

Worship is the acknowledgment of the “worth-ship” (Anglo-Saxon) of God. The focus of all true worship is on the Lord. Authentic worship is often accompanied by praise. He invites us, “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Psalm 95:6).

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to “draw near to God” (Hebrews 10:22). He also tells us how we are to approach God: (1) *With a sincere heart*. Our hearts are to be undivided and ready to obey. (2) *In full assurance of faith*. We can approach Him with confidence because we trust Him fully. (3) *Having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience*. Because Christ has cleansed us within, we can enter God’s presence without feelings of guilt. (4) *Having our bodies washed with pure water*. We are reminded that the actions that flow from a cleansed heart are righteous and holy.

Drawing Near to God

You are encouraged to make time daily to “draw near to God” following the directives of Hebrews 10:19-25.

- ▶ “Let us draw near to God” (v. 21).
- ▶ “Let us hold unswervingly the hope we profess” (v. 23).
- ▶ “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (v. 24).
- ▶ “Let us not give up meeting together” (v. 25).
- ▶ “Let us encourage one another” (v. 25).

Our Mission

1. We recognize the mutually supportive roles of the adult Sunday School, namely nurture, fellowship, and outreach.
Nurture: The personal and spiritual growth of the individual through ongoing encounters with God’s Word within a community of believers.
Fellowship: Building caring and supportive relationships between adults.
Outreach: Reaching beyond the group-setting to others outside through evangelism, service, and personal application of session truths.
2. WordAction curriculum is committed to a twofold emphasis of both content learning (Word) and life change based on that encounter with the Word (Action).
3. WordAction curriculum is distinctly Wesleyan-Holiness in theological perspective in selection of scripture themes and presentation.
4. We seek to provide the tools and confidence for adults to read, understand, and live by God’s Word.
5. This curriculum explores the Bible in its variety of scope, literature, and themes.
6. The Bible is lifted up as the fundamental, legitimate, and practical authority and guide for living today.
7. We desire to allow the powerful Word of God to speak for itself as adults discover its message, understanding its proper context and application.
8. These materials show that the Bible tells a unified and comprehensive story of God’s gracious interaction with people throughout history.
9. Encouragement is given to provide an environment where emphasis is placed on discovering God’s Word within a community of believers in contrast to an individual-only course of study.
10. Knowing that adults learn through a variety of learning styles, this curriculum encourages a variety of presentation methodologies.
11. We desire to assist the adult leader in personal spiritual growth and excellence in facilitating group growth.
12. The importance of daily individual study of God’s Word through Scripture memorization and reading is emphasized each week.