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A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1** **Why** do you think our world ridicules holiness? (not fake, “holier-than-thou” stuff, but real moral purity) Tell us about a time when you saw **real** holiness in action in a secular context.
- 2** **Why** don't you think we see more of it?
- 3** Where do you land on the “optimism—pessimism” scale when you think about your prospects for observable growth in holiness in this life? **Why** do you place yourself there?

Hopeless that you'll ever make much progress. Expecting more failure than success. Expecting more success than failure. Confident that someday you'll be described as "mature".
- 4** Does your response reflect **both** personal humility **and** God-honoring faith? Explain.
- 5** Tell us about a time when you saw “right thinking” lead to holiness—or **wrong** thinking lead to unholiness?
- 6** Think of the person you know who has served as a model of Christian holiness. When and how did you first get to know him? What three words best describe her?
- 7** What do you know about his journey toward Christian holiness? Of what you know, what role did hardship and disappointment play? Do you think she would say that the price has been worth it?
- 8** How has his example “spurred you on to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24)?

Application-Challenge

- Remember that true holiness is rooted in a humble heart and a commitment to truth, not simply in outward conformity to a moral code.
- When you are frustrated by your moral failure, remember God's mercy and grace. Come to God, to confess your sin, and receive the forgiveness Christ purchased on the cross. Thank God for sensitivity to sin—in your struggle, you may be closer to true holiness than you realize.
- When you are tempted to focus on the sins of others, take a hard look at your own life instead. First, deal with the log in your eye before you attempt to take the speck out of someone else's eye!
- If you have not placed your trust in Christ as Savior—you **need** to take that step today.

- 1 Although this question may require some careful thought, it serves as a “soft ball” opening question since it doesn’t require vulnerable self-disclosure (that’ll come a bit later). Help folks grapple with how the unsaved world views “holiness”. Some suggestions are: It’s boring. It’s judgmental. It’s for losers...

Then, segue to the second question: “Tell us about a time when you saw *real* holiness in action...” (Keep your antennae up to try and sense how your group members feel about authentic holiness.)

- 2 Possible answers include:
 - Christians are too worldly—we aren’t living authentically holy lives—or too fearful of what others may think.
 - Pastors haven’t done a good enough job at making true disciples (rather than mere converts).
 - Too many “Christians” may not even be genuinely saved (weeds masquerading as wheat; Matthew 13:24–30).
- 3 **Now** we move into the “vulnerability zone”!
(Keep your antennae up for statements which reveal a longing for growth. **That’s** a person to give more personal attention to! Contact Pastor Dan for some suggestions for helping them make more progress.)
- 4 Consider turning to 2 Corinthians 2:14—3:6. (Notice the word “adequate/adequacy” appears 4x in verses 2:16 and 3:5-6—and the **concept** of adequacy is all over this passage!). Christians really should be hopeful about growth—not because we’re so good or growth is so easy (**neither** of those are true!), but because God loves displaying **his** glory through jars of clay (see 4:7)! Also, God has promised to complete the work he started in us (see Philippians 1:6).
- 5 Plan on reading the final paragraph of the **Sermon Summary** to re-familiarize folks with this idea. Also, be prepared to “prime the pump” with an example from your own life. But don’t volunteer your answer too soon—folks will need time to chew on this one a bit.
- 6 Again, plan on “priming the pump” with your own answer to this question. Keep your answer brief, and it will help others come up with their own examples. Then, just toss the question back to them: *“How about you all? who has served as a model of Christian holiness **for you**? When and how did you first get to know him? What three words best describe her?”*
- 7 For this follow-up question, consider asking those individuals in your group who gave the most specific, concrete answers to 6 to answer these follow-up questions. You’re looking for principles which may be transferrable to our lives today.
- 8 Hebrews 13:7 says: *“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and **considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**”*
Choose the meatiest, most helpful insights from 7 and, regardless of who in your group shared that particularly story, toss those insights out to the whole group so that all group members can consider how to use the example of others to bring forth growth in themselves.

Sermon Summary (Key Texts: Luke 18:9–14 & John 17:14-19)

God clearly calls us to holiness—but what does true holiness look like? As a young believer, growth in holiness seemed like “three steps forward, two steps back”. My frustration was aggravated by some of my Christian friends who gave me the impression that they no longer struggled. There is a lot of confusion among Christians concerning what God expects in us and from us. What is the true nature of holiness? What does holiness consist of?

First, true holiness is rooted in a humble heart, not in a blameless character (Luke 18:9-14). When we hear the word “Pharisee” we have negative thoughts, but in Jesus’ day, they were the ones who were considered to be holy, who seemed to have it all together. Even Jesus’ disciples had great respect for the Pharisees. Many of us would view a Pharisee as a “victorious Christian”—his spiritual disciplines are all in place: Bible study, prayer, fasting, Scripture memory, even tithing. But Jesus contrasted this “holy man” with someone who was deemed to be on the opposite end of the spiritual spectrum, someone who was considered morally bankrupt. Contrary to expectations, Jesus said that it is not the Pharisee who is righteous, but the tax-collector! It was his heart attitude toward God that made him righteous (v. 14). Many of us here today—like the Pharisees—are more sensitive to other people’s sins than we are to our own; we feel like we are in pretty good shape spiritually. If so, we need to hear the stern words of Jesus towards this Pharisee. But there are others of us here today who are more like the tax-collector. We know we’re a mess. We are very much aware of how far we fall short of God’s standards. The problem with many of us who are like the tax-collector is that we want to be like the Pharisee (with no sin to confess except that of others)! Those who struggle with sin may be closer to true holiness than you think! You see, the real threat to your spiritual life isn’t moral imperfection (or even moral bankruptcy)—the real threat is in having a callused heart. It is in being blind to your own sin. The real mark of holiness isn’t outward conformity to a set of moral standards; the real mark of holiness is a pure and contrite heart—a heart that is sensitive to God, a heart that never tires of grieving over sin or confessing sin. The Bible says that David had a heart that was right toward God—yet he committed all of the “major sins”: adultery, murder, deception, and lying! But his heart wasn’t callused. In the midst of his moral failures David consistently came back to God to humble himself, to repent, to confess his sin, and receive God’s mercy. True holiness isn’t so much about conforming to some moral code as it is being in a right relationship with God. It is within reach of us all—if we are willing to humble ourselves, confess our sins and claim Christ’s forgiveness. Moral purity is important—but just being conformed outwardly to a moral code isn’t the essence of holiness. If that were the case, the Pharisees nailed it! So, what is your heart attitude toward God? Are you more aware of others’ failures than you are of your own? When you read about the grace of God in the Bible, does it strike a powerful emotional chord, or is it just another dry doctrine that we affirm as Christians? The answers to these questions reveal much about your personal progress toward holiness.

Furthermore, true holiness begins with right thinking, not right behavior (John 17:14-19). Jesus warned against thinking that we can be holy by separating ourselves from the world. Insulation, not isolation, is the key to living rightly in the world. But how do we insulate ourselves from moral compromise? How do we remain in the world without conforming to its value system? By being a thermostat, not a thermometer. A thermostat sets the temperature in a room; a thermometer merely reflects what is going on around it. But how do we do that? By being “sanctified in the truth” (v. 17). It means seeing reality as it really is, knowing yourself as you really are. Truth sets you free. Things like... “He who is first shall be last” and “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” and “Love your neighbor and your enemy” and “Forgive as you have been forgiven” and “Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted.” We all know that Jesus said these things. We affirm that they are true, but our behavior reveals what we really believe. We can kid ourselves by conforming to a doctrinal confession in our mind, but our behavior will demonstrate what we really believe to be true. Holiness begins with really believing what God says. You see it is possible to conform outwardly to a code of morality without any of the infrastructure of belief behind it. So often holiness in the Christian community is boiled down to not doing certain things, and to doing certain other things. Many Christians talk about loving one another on Sunday, but on Monday they chase after the same things the world does—money, power, status. The holiness Jesus is seeking to develop in his people requires a radically new way of viewing life, different from the world. Holiness is characterized by a right relationship with God rather than mere conformity to a moral code. A sign of personal revival is not so much a sense of victorious living as it is a sense of how far I fall short of God’s standards. Mature believers tend to focus more on God’s grace, his compassion and patience, rather than on their spiritual victories. That is not to say that they have no victories, they do. It is just that they are so aware of their defeats, and their need for God’s grace, that they boast very little about their victories. Don’t be too intimidated by your failure. Like the tax-collector, in your struggle, you may be closer to true holiness than you think you are. The thing you should fear is not the outward moral collapse, but the callused heart inwardly. For it is when we stop being concerned about our sin and God’s holiness that we have real problems. Then we have the heart of the Pharisee (and usually without his outward righteousness). True holiness begins with right thinking. The world tells us that truth is limited to what we can see, hear, taste and touch. We are told that the universe we live in is material and mechanistic. That view permeates ethics and morality. Truth, society says, is not determined by an objective standard but either by what works (“pragmatism”) or by what we think will benefit the greatest number of people (“utilitarianism”). In both cases man has replaced God as the standard giver. The Bible tells us that there is much more to life than that which science can uncover. Science uncovers a part of reality. But there is another world, another reality, a spiritual reality which was in existence before the material world, and which in many respects is far more important. We must not ignore spiritual reality. We must not ignore that we are made in the image of God, that God exists, that He has spoken in the Bible, and that we are accountable to him. As we come to embrace these truths, we will discover that they will set us free! We will live differently, because we will think differently.

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

All this week we'll focus on Hebrews 12:1-15, a classic passage on growth in real holiness.

Monday—Read Hebrews 12:1-15 three times.

- What **emotions** do you get as you read this passage?
- **Why do you think** you get that “emotional feel” from this passage?

Tuesday—Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

- What emotions do you get as you read v. 1-3? What words/phrases give you that impression?
- Contrast the emotions you get from v. 1-3 with the emotions you got Monday from v. 1-15.

Wednesday—Read Hebrews 12:4-6.

- What **motives** lie behind God's discipline towards us?
- What do you think **“making light of” God's discipline** might look like? Do you do that?
- What do you think **“losing heart at” God's rebuke** might look like? Do you do that?

Thursday—Read Hebrews 12:7-8.

- Describe a time when you experienced God's discipline.
- Whose kids do you discipline more, your own or others'? Give a few reasons for this.
- According to v. 8, of what should God's discipline make us confident? Are you confident?

Friday—Read Hebrews 12:9-11.

- The discipline of our earthly parents is described in three ways. What are they?
- How is God's discipline **different** from that of our earthly parents?
- What does v. 10 say is the **goal** of God's discipline? How have you seen this in your life?

Saturday—Read Hebrews 12:12-15.

- Verses 12-13 are **figurative**. **Restate in literal terms** the command they make.
- What does v. 14a command us to do **personally**? What happens when we don't (v. 14b)?
- What does v. 15a command us to do **for others**? What happens when we don't (v. 15b)?
- How would TCC be different if we obeyed v. 12-15 better?

Interested?
Contact
Pastor Dan



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