

Session 3 - Which Leads Us to Holiness

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Date: 03 May 2026

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[0 : 0 0] This is a sermon from King's Church West London. Thank you. Well, it is an honour for me to be speaking this morning and again thank you! so much for having us on your church weekend. It has been great and we've loved every moment of it and you've just made us feel so welcome and you've looked after us so thank you. It was a special time in the room last night wasn't it as we worshipped and it was a special time this morning just now as we worshipped but last night as we finished with that beautiful hymn I had such a sense of God's delight for you guys as a church, as his people and as you delighted in him in worship I felt like he was saying he was so delighted in your worship and I saw you in your building worshipping with that same heart and as you glorified God I just saw rivers of worship just flowing into your community in a pole and as you put God in his rightful place I sensed that there was going to be much fruit because there is a sound of worship it felt like you have a unique heart for worship in the church that cannot be contained in the building and I just saw these kind of streams of living water flowing from you as you gathered as church but in your individual lives as well and it was just like rivers going into that dry and weary land just needing the kingdom of God so be encouraged in that but why don't we just pray and lift that to God. Father we just thank you for that beautiful reminder that you delight in your people God. You delight in your people as we worship you, as we live for you, as we lift your name high and I just want to thank you for what you've done in this church that you are building your church God and you have provided an actual physical building. We're so grateful God, we're so thankful for that and I just pray at the start of this kind of new season of knowing that these guys have that building. Lord I pray for that community God, that dry and weary land, that parched land that needs the good news of Jesus. Lord I pray that you would almost recommit this church to that area

God and this would be almost like a fresh start for them, a fresh planting into that community. So we give it to you Father, just pray your kingdom would come in your great name, amen.

So moving on from that, I'm going to be speaking into the subject of holiness this morning and obviously holiness is a vast, huge, ginormous topic and we cannot do it justice in 30 minutes. So I simply want to just bring a reminder of holiness and the importance of it and some practical pointers if you like for you to keep living in holiness, to decide to choose to live a holy life because it's a beautiful response to this grace and hope that we looked at yesterday which has been freely lavished upon us. Why would we not want to respond to that? And one thing I've been reminded of as I've been preparing this preach is that humanly I feel completely unqualified to speak on such a subject but you know being holy and living a holy life is not so much about me at all but it's about the work, the transformation that God will do in my life because of his grace and because of his love for me.

He is the one who transforms us. We cannot ever live a holy life without a supernatural work of God within us. It's not about us being really, really good people and just trying and striving really hard. It's about God's transformational power within us. Richard Foster in his book, *Spiritual Discipline*, says this and I hope it encourages you. It says, when we despair of gaining inner transformation through our human powers of will and our determination, when we despair then we are open to a wonderful new realisation. Inner righteousness, holiness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God's work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God. It is a grace that is given.

[4 : 3 6] I don't know about you but I'm so grateful for the grace of God that meets us in our weakness, for the love of God that never forsakes us and for the gift of Jesus who made a way for us to be holy and for the Holy Spirit because he gently guides us and grows us in a life of holiness.

So what is holiness? I love how J.I. Packer puts it. He says this, holiness is a lifelong passion for loving God and following his ways. There is no holiness without a Christ-centred, Christ-seeking, Christ-serving, Christ-adoring heart. Isn't that beautiful? A Christ-centred heart is going to equal one thing, a lifestyle reflecting holiness, a life that's going to look like Jesus.

So how is your heart today? Is it Christ-centred? Is it Christ-adoring? Which is of course what we all want to say a resounding yes to. But the reality of life is such that we might need a heart check and allow the Spirit of God to reorder, if you like, some priorities within us, that he would once again be our first love. You know, holiness always starts in the heart, doesn't it? On the inside. And because our heart is Christ-centred, we have new affections, we have new desires that lead us to new behavior.

And it's an internal transformation which is going to result in an outward display, this overflow from our heart. The alternative is we can be like the Pharisees, who Jesus said were like whitewashed tombs, trying to display holiness, look great in what they're doing, all on the outside whilst internally they're dying, they remain unchanged. And throughout the Bible you will well know that God calls us to be holy. 1 Peter 1 verse 13 to 16, this is what it says, therefore with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 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, because I am holy. And 1 Thessalonians 4 verse 3 says it is God's will that you should be sanctified, which is becoming more like Jesus.

[7 : 12] So I'd love just to remind ourselves of this process of becoming holy and just make sure that we are all on the same page. How do we even become holy? Well, when we come to faith, when we find new life in Christ, when we repent of our sin and we know his forgiveness, we become children of God, don't we?

We're adopted into his family. And in that moment of turning to him, we're justified, just as if we had never sinned. We heard it yesterday. We stand before this incredible holy God, righteous, washed clean, and we are made holy because we are literally in him and he is holy and we're seated with Christ.

So that is our position. And as we walk this new life of faith from that first day of salvation, until our last breath on earth, we are, sorry, we spend our life being sanctified, meaning we are set apart for God and his holy purpose, becoming more like Jesus in our everyday life. And it's in this process of sanctification that we must lean into and have relationship with the Holy Spirit for us to grow in holiness and for this change to be ongoing within us. Galatians 6 reminds us, he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. We grow in holiness with the Spirit of God. So we're justified at salvation, declared holy in Christ, we're a holy people, it's a fact, it cannot be disputed. And then sanctification is this process of being being transformed, being changed. And justification and sanctification are always linked, aren't they?

We can't truly have one without the other. If we're justified and saved, we'll be known by the fruit that we bear, which is our sanctification, becoming more like Jesus. And sanctification is a gift, a work of God. But we must also engage with it. You know that, don't you? We need to be disciplined with it. We need to put to death our old self and choose to reflect this new creation that we are becoming through the grace of God who enables us. And this is a journey that does not end until we take our first breath in heaven, where we will be made perfect, complete and whole in all things. And it's this process of sanctification that we're just going to briefly look at this morning.

And we can only do this, as I've said, through the grace of God. So just remember that as I'm speaking. It's this grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Because holiness is not legalism.

[10 : 04] It is not about rules and regulations. This is about a living relationship with our Saviour. We want to be holy because we love God. We have this Christ-centered, Christ-adoring heart where he has our true affection. Titus 2, verse 11 to 14. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. That's the justification. Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. That's the sanctification. While we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own. That's us. Eager to do what is good.

Jesus gave himself for us that we might be holy. What a sacrifice was made. What a gift to us. Let that stir in you a response to honour the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, which we've just heard

about, by you choosing intentionally to place him at the centre, to have a Christ-adoring heart, which will enable you to live a holy life, being eager to do what is good, worthy of your calling. J.I. Packer again, he says, holiness is the goal of our redemption. We are born again that we might grow up into Christ-likeness. So is holiness a goal for us? Is holiness a desire in our lives? Are we thinking about it? Do we dwell on it? Do we long for it? We all have a responsibility to live a holy life. And whilst it is a gift, as I've said, it won't just happen. We need to be intentional. God has given us this free gift of our will, hasn't he? Where some choices we make carry a consequence for godly living and some do not. It's like, are we so into the flesh or are we so into the spirit? And maybe today is an opportunity for you to examine your heart, to repent, so that there are no barriers between us and God. You know, repentance makes way for a life to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and it allows God to produce in us what he desires, which is of course holiness. Ongoing repentance is vital to living a holy life. Repentance, let it not be far from your lips. Let's not think too highly of ourselves that this is something we rarely do, but let's humble ourselves and just welcome in the work of God within us. And of course it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to see growth in holiness. He empowers us with grace to grow as a Jesus follower. We simply cannot grow in holiness and become more like Jesus without the Holy Spirit. We cannot do it in our own strength. So if you've been trying, you can lay that down. The Holy Spirit is this magnificent gift to us, a gift to be cherished who will always draw us to Jesus and glorify him. A gift that can bring joy in the hardest of days. A gift that can bring strength in our weakest moments. A gift that can bring courage when we feel so desperately afraid. A gift enabling us to be resolute when we feel so weak-willed. In John 14, Jesus calls us to live a holy life by doing what he commands. And alongside that, he promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples and to us to help us in that.

[14:02] Verse 15 of that chapter says, If you love me, keep my commands, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit.

Verse 23, Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. It's that call to holiness. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Verse 25, But the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

So the Holy Spirit is here to remind you of everything Jesus has said. As you read the Bible, he will bring things to mind, and he will never contradict what the Bible says.

That's why we test and we measure all things by the word of God. The Holy Spirit wants to be your personal trainer, if you like. Anyone have a personal trainer? We might need one after this weekend. I'm like, whoa, that lasagna was amazing.

[15:10] He wants to be your personal trainer in all things holy. He wants you to rely on him, to depend on him, and for you to stop trying to do this in your own strength.

You know, how many times during your day do you need a gentle reminder of how to live, how to react, how to speak in a manner that reflects a holy life? We need to train our hearts to be open, to pause and just listen to his gentle voice.

Will you let him call to mind scriptures that you've read? And then from that you can respond to daily situations in a holy manner. Just a few nights ago I had to switch the television off.

I am watching this really great program actually, and I still don't know how it ended, so you know where it's going. But the language was not great, but it was kind of going from not great to really, really, really not great.

And this verse comes into my mind, and it's just like, whatever is pure, whatever is true, whatever is noble, think about these things. And of course it's Philippians 4. And I just knew in that moment as this program is playing that it was a prompt from the Holy Spirit.

[16:20] And these days I am trying really hard to act quickly and not make excuses and not reason myself into a place of ignoring that prompt. Get the remote.

Don't think about it. Turn it off. Obviously that is potentially annoying if you're watching television with someone else, but you can sort that out. But you see what I'm saying?

Holy living requires action. And the more we are aware of who this Holy Spirit is and what he's producing in us, the more we will come to rely upon him.

The more we will pause and we will listen to his voice. And it becomes our way of life. And when our affections are all about Christ, our desires are going to change. What happens though when we get

it wrong?

Because we will. What happens when I so often get it wrong? I go to the throne of grace. We heard about it yesterday. I keep repentance close on my lips. I know his forgiveness.

[17 : 16] And then I continue on. And as we choose to be directed by the Holy Spirit, remember it's a choice. We have free will. As we make choices for holiness, our choices have consequences.

And they're good ones. These consequences are an outworking, literally, of the fruit of the Spirit.

And your life is going to look more and more like this.

Galatians 5. But the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Again, Richard Foster says this, We did no more than receive a gift. Yet we know the changes are real. We know they are real because we find that the spirit of compassion, or you could insert whatever your struggle is, once found so hard is now easy. Divine love has entered our inner spirit and taken over our habit patterns. In the unguarded moments, there is a spontaneous flow of the fruits of the Spirit.

[18 : 21] No longer is there any need to hide our inner selves from others. Transformation, a reflection of the life Jesus lived on earth and who we want to look like and be like.

It's sanctification. You know, the Holy Spirit is for you. This is what he is about. You know, this is good for us.

Live a holy life and you will know freedom. You will know a closeness with God. And because of the fruits of the Spirit, you know, our mental health, our physical health will be better for it.

Who does not want peace? The consequences are good. You know, we had some really cold days earlier in the year. And during those days, I was just noticing so many birds in the garden just desperate for food.

And they were kind of pecking at the walls of the house, which I haven't seen before. They were a lot more visible and they were really vocal because they were looking desperately for food. So I, being a good citizen, put some of our bird food on the deck and various places in our garden.

[19 : 35] And these birds were just not seeing it. And I was just getting really frustrated. And I'm trying to get their attention. I'm kind of doing, I don't know what I was doing, some kind of weird bird dance with my arms.

But, you know, in my mind's eye, I was reminded of that Disney film. I think it was Snow White and she's having this lovely moment with the birds. But surprisingly, they didn't respond to me like that. But the point is, what I was offering them was good for them.

It was sustenance. It was life-giving. But they did not see it. And isn't it so often the same with us?

The Holy Spirit is present. He's encouraging us. He's cheering us on to live like Jesus.

He's laid a table for us of everything that's good, that's beautiful. This feast, the word of God, the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit. And this table is here. And it's here in the presence of my enemies. It's here in the presence of my difficult situation, my temptation, my sin. Yet so often we just choose to ignore the table. And we choose to starve.

[20 : 38] And we make unhelpful choices. Instead of sitting at the table with Jesus and leaning into this gift of sanctification, sit with Jesus. He wants to be closer than a friend.

You know, as human beings, we all long for community to be loved and to belong. God, through his Spirit, he longs for this to be experienced in him.

Our closest relationship, our greatest love with him. And it's in this relationship that we're enabled to live holy. Why? Because we love.

We love Jesus. We adore him. And it spurs us on to live right. We spend time with Jesus and we begin to look more and more like him.

We begin to love his ways. This is not about rules. This is about freedom. Living who you were created to be in relationship with God. John 14, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

[21 : 39] We want to honour him because we love him. And we don't want to hinder our relationship in any way. So make the holy choice every day.

Listen to the Holy Spirit because holiness draws me closer to God and Jesus. And as you live a life for holiness, you also will be noticed by your enemy.

Remember, as a Christian, you are in a battle and Satan hates holiness. And he is after your holiness. Satan is looking for any and every opportunity to minimise your sanctification, to disrupt your relationship with God by encouraging you into sin, to make wrong choices.

And he's just watching you. He's watching for a weakness. And he's crafty. And he's good at it. So be on your guard. I find this verse in Genesis really poignant.

It's Genesis 4, verse 7. And it says, But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

[22 : 51] You, we, must rule over sin. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. God, the Holy Spirit, gives you the literal strength to say no to sin and yes to holiness.

And then the ball is in your court. Will you act? Will you walk towards holiness and away from sin? It's always an action. Earlier this year, my sister was staying with us.

And we were getting ready to go out. And she comes into the lounge and she's ready for us to go. And you know, sometimes when you see something, it takes a moment for your brain to catch up with what you're really seeing because you just don't expect it.

And my sister has her woolly beanie hat on because it's one of those cold days. And I'm looking at her and my first thought is honestly this. Why is she wearing a fascinator on top of her hat?

You know what a fascinator is? These fancy wedding things. And then my brain realises with a certain degree of fear that upon her hat sits a very large spider.

[23 : 59] His, I know, I know. His feet are only touching her hat because it has knees, it has long legs, and is kind of standing proud of the hat.

Hence, mimicking the fascinator shape. And I didn't think too much about what to do. I just reach out and I swipe her hat off her head so that we can get this creature on the floor and deal humanely with it.

Aker, Michael, please help. It was huge, wasn't it? Michael always comes to my rescue with spiders and he just grabs them in his hand.

So brave. Anyway, he stepped towards this spider and he retreated and went and got some kitchen roll. That's how big this thing was. But my response in that moment was not something to be considered.

I did not want this spider in my life, in my house, in my family. No, the spider was going. Would our response be the same towards sin?

[25 : 02] Get sin off me and walk resolute towards holiness. But so often we turn from his strength. We turn from that gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit.

And we decide to choose our own desires. And you know, our flesh as well can be a huge enemy to our holiness. Our flesh naturally will want to resist holiness.

We can all relate, can't we? We have that sudden decision to make or that way to respond. And in a moment, as sin is crouching at our door, we've lent into sin. And we've turned aside from the Holy Spirit.

And in the pit of our stomach, we feel it. You can relate. We know that conviction, that sickening feeling. What do we do? Do we instantly repent?

Do we put it right with God and others? Or do we compromise? Well, it's just a one-off. It's okay. You know, A.W. Tozer said this. He said, be hard on yourself and easy on others.

[25 : 59] Carry your own cross, but never lay one on the back of another. Examine my heart, God. You never ask me to examine someone else's.

Be hard on yourself in a grace-filled way. Search me, God, and know my heart. See if there is anything offensive in me. We want to be right with God, don't we?

But yet our culture says, be kind to yourself. You are so worth it. And yes, I get this. I have said it. But which one will really point us towards holiness?

Be kind to yourself? Well, it's okay. You're going through a really hard time. God understands if you've made that lifestyle choice or you've acted in a way that contradicts his word.

Does he? God understands our humanity. Yes, definitely. There's always grace. There's always forgiveness from him. But he will never say, do you know what? I'm going to turn a blind eye to that.

[26 : 56] You go off and sin. That's absolutely fine. Being hard on yourself, holding yourself and your actions accountable is ironically being kind to yourself.

Don't turn a blind eye to that compromise to holiness in your life. Because if you do, it's just the start of that distance between you and God. Where the more you allow sin, the longer it goes on, the harder it then is to repent and to hear his gentle voice and to grow in holiness.

So to finish, practically, how am I going to grow in this life of holiness? Well, as we've said, it starts with salvation and repentance. You're justified.

You are made holy in your standing before God. That is always the start point. Just on that note, I just want to say to you, are you saved? Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? And, you know, this is the most single important decision of your life. Today, in a moment, you can get right with God. You can be forgiven of your sin and made holy in his sight.

[28 : 06] And then following salvation, as we've said, you live this life of sanctification where you become more like Jesus. And to do it, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit and keep on being filled with him daily.

Live closely with him. Spend time in prayer. Spend time in the Bible. Know it. Meditate on it. And be instructed in holiness. And, you know, the Holy Spirit will bring to mind what you read and enable you and empower you to respond in a way that reflects holiness.

Surround yourself with people who speak truth into your life. People who are actively pursuing holiness, desiring to live like Jesus.

And these people will spur you on in God to live holy. And they are a gift to your life. Look around the room. It's the family of God. And you are a gift as well to their lives.

I love this account from John Wesley. In 1729, John Wesley established what was to be nicknamed the Holy Club.

[29 : 15] It was a group that met with a purpose of taking faith more seriously. And these guys would study God's word. They would pray together and be accountable to each other.

By asking each other really hard questions that would illuminate sin and spur them on to holy living. And there's quite a few questions.

And you can look them up online. But I'm just going to give you a flavor of what these are like. So these are what they would ask each other as they met as the Holy Club.

I'm just going to read three to you just to give you an idea of what they were like. They're big questions. Are there any patterns of sin in my life that need to be confessed?

Do I have any idols in my life that need to be dethroned? Some big questions. That if taken seriously, need time and honesty spent on them.

[30 : 16] Are partnering with the Holy Spirit to allow him to illuminate these barriers and blockages that can so often stifle our growth in holiness. And you know, we all have something.

We all have them. It's a great question as we live in a culture that is far from God. Far from holy living. And is constantly trying to make us look more like the culture than the people of God, isn't it? The Holy Spirit, if you are a child of God, indwells within us. He sees it all. He knows it all. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Are we building our relationship with him?

Are we allowing him full and complete access? You know, God wants all of us. And until we give him all of us, we can't fully be sanctified. You know, we can't pick and mix and hide areas of our life from God.

And when we have this revelation that yes, God's Spirit lives within me, when we love him and care about our relationship, it changes who we are. We want to live in this unified communion with God.

[31 : 21] And when we do, life is so much better. Holy living. Will we cooperate with the Holy Spirit and welcome daily this process of sanctification?

Will we walk in full obedience to God, embracing his word, which keeps us on the right path? Will we challenge ourselves with hard questions, be accountable to others so that we can grow in holiness and honour God with our lives?

Choose holiness today and every day. Be fuelled by his immeasurable love and grace for you. And remember this eternal hope to which he has called us, eternity in his perfect presence.

So fix your eyes on him. Fix your heart on him. Follow him and his holiness all of your days. And be amazed at the transformation and the change that comes from the inside out as you surrender your will to his.

Amen.