

**“Living the Resurrection”, 1 Thessalonians**  
**Model Faith (Wholly-ness)**  
**6.16.19**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:1-10**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“If you feel it appropriate, share your experiences of your own earthly father. Do you feel that your relationship with him made it easier or more difficult to relate to God as ‘Father’?”*

*“What do you think of when you hear the word ‘holiness’? Hope? Condemnation?”*

*“In your own experience, in what ways have you seen holiness divide people instead of distinguish them? What are some of the challenges of living ‘Christianly’ in a culture with such divergent values?”*

*“Does having the Bible refer to you as ‘holy one’ or ‘saint’ create tension within you? Have you ever used that moniker to describe yourself?”*

*“Do you think holiness is more about who you are or what you do? Do you think that the idea of holiness anticipates a consistency between the two?”*

*“How many of present your pursuits would you say are motivated by fear? How much of your current activity is driven by a determination to validate yourself or win the approval of another?”*

*“Do you feel that such motivation is healthy and sustainable?”*

*“Where in your life are you able to detect responses which are motivated, not by your desire to be loved, but by the realization that you already are loved?”*

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## Teaching Notes...

**God is “holy”. God’s will is for you to be “holy”.**

**Holy is a way of describing, first and foremost, what God does in and for us, and not something we do to secure the title.**

**You can only pursue holiness from a place of holiness.**

**Love can be the only legitimate motivation for holiness.**

**God is “holy”.**

*“Who is like you among the gods, O Lord--- glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders?” Exodus 15:11*

To identify God as holy is to identify his “God-ness”. Holiness is everything about God that distinguishes him and makes him worthy of our singular devotion.

qadowsh (Hebrew: kaw-doshe)- *sacred; other; marked off as distinct; set apart; devoted; worthy of devotion; wholeness*

The Story requires us to deal with God as he reveals himself, not as we imagine him to be. We don’t get God on ‘our own terms’. God is never simply a projection of our own imaginations and, therefore, never limited by our lack of understanding or experience. He is holy.

**“Holy” is a way of helping to describe, first and foremost, what God does IN and FOR us and not something we do to secure the label.**

*“It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began -- to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 1:9*

God’s people **“were”** holy by virtue of the fact that he had chosen them. It had nothing to do with any glaring qualities that made them the obvious favorite. It was because God chose them that they were chosen (Deuteronomy 7). They **“were to be holy”** as a reflection of their understanding of their identity.

**You can only rightfully pursue holiness from a place of holiness.**

Before we are ever called to be good, we are called to be holy. We dare not even talk about holiness as a lifestyle until we become convinced of holiness as an identity.

The phrase that Paul uses most often to provide both the motivation and the means of such a reality is, **“in Christ”**. It’s a way of recognizing that there is something about our present relationship which is directly altering our life.

**“But, calling us “holy” when we don’t particularly act holy... isn’t that some lame attempt at manipulative flattery? Why not tell them the way it really is?”**

We give consent to a lot of beliefs about God and about ourselves that *‘just ain’t true!’* When we consent to those things, we give them authority over our lives and they create the boundaries in which we function and what we believe to be possible for our lives.

Our confession of being, *“in Christ”*, is the healthy antithesis of shame. It gives direction to my feelings and allows me to interrupt all the damaging self-talk. It helps to create more distance between my brokenness and the person that I’m becoming. It’s not some cathartic attempt to excuse my sin, instead, I am declaring, *“I’m not that person anymore!”*

*“Be holy because I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 20:26) God doesn’t say, *“Try to be holy as I am holy”*--- he wants us simply to allow our present arrangement with him (accepted/loved) to compel us toward a lifestyle that’s in keeping with who we really are.

### **Love can be the only legitimate motivation for holiness.**

Holiness is everything that makes God “glorious”. When God loses his glory, so do we, because we are created in the “image” of God. What is most glorious about God is that he is “love”. What is most glorious about us is that we are the “be-loved”.

I experience a disproportionate number of people who believe that God is pre-disposed to them and desires only their purposed-best. There is a glaring disparity between the revelation that, *“God is love”* (1 John 4) and those who, *“live in love”* (Ephesians 5:1).

Without a deep, personal encounter of the love of God, by the Holy Spirit, we will tend to misuse and abuse the Law (commands). You will always confuse compliance with righteousness (*“The written letters alone bring death. The Spirit gives life.”* 2 Corinthians 3:6)

*“... Christ’s love compels us” (has left us no other choice).* 2 Corinthians 5:14

Interestingly, the word “saint” means, not only, *“pure, clean”*, but *“warmed by tender love; cherished”*.

Listen...you’ll never again have to use guilt or obligation as a means of motivating people who have come to understand and experience this kind of love.

**You should avoid any pursuit of ‘holiness’ that is performance-oriented and shame-based.**

Even hearing the challenge to, *“find out what pleases the Lord”*, or *“live in ways that are pleasing to God”*, launches us into murky waters [Psalm 69:30-31; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Hebrews 11:6].

Some of you grew up in households with a father that never noticed you; with a mother who was never satisfied. So, you end up being ‘quietly compliant’ but dangerously resentful.

So, we envision God as perpetually disappointed. We must find ways to excel which will secure our father’s attention. The message is all-too-clear: “inadequate”.

The beauty of grace. *“Still sinners... Christ died for us...”* (Romans 5) Perhaps that doesn’t even settle the issue for us, at times. We conclude that we are so messed up that it cost Jesus his life. Because he knows our propensities, he frontloads it with “love” (*“...we know how dearly God loves us...”*)

**Choose an approach that is not based on “deprivation”, but on “transformation”.**

Unless you know God--- unless you know love--- you will hear all the commands as prohibitions, not provisions for blessing.

God is not attempting to deprive you of pleasure, but your pleasure is not his ultimate concern. Your wholeness, is.

**Don’t commit yourself to obedience for obedience’ sake. Commit yourself to becoming the kind of person who desires to obey.**

I always wanted so much more from my children than obedience. I expected obedience but not because that’s what brought me the most joy. I knew there would come a time in their development where they would begin to question my authority--- to call into question my intentions--- but my hope was always in love, not the rules of the house.

*“How happy I was to meet with some of your children and find them living according to the truth, just as the Father commanded.”* 2 John

God’s never been interested in compliant children, but people who share his heart and when given the opportunity to choose, find themselves choosing the way(s) of Jesus. *“Doing the will of God from the heart”*. Ephesians 6:6

***Maybe we have misunderstood holiness? Maybe it’s holiness that actually compels him to move toward us rather than to shrink away from our mess? Maybe it’s holiness that makes him most qualified demonstrate to us what it’s like to be fully human? Maybe it’s holiness that makes him even more approachable than we had ever imagined?***