
“Pursuing Holiness”
(1 Peter 1:15-16)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

NIV 1 Peter 1:15-16

¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

The older I get, the fewer New Years resolutions I tend to make. I don't know if this is true with you, but it tends to be true with me. I think part of it is a good thing and on the other hand it's a bad thing. It's a good thing because I think I am more aware of who I am as a person, how God has wired me, what I'm capable of. I've come to terms with myself.

For years, every New Year, I'd pull out this sheet of paper and begin this thorough examination of my life. I'd look at my spiritual life, my relationships, my growth intellectually and growth physically. And under each of these major headings, I'd have subheadings. For example, under the category of relationships I'd have family, friends, acquaintances. And then under family for example, I'd have immediate family and extended family. Under immediate family I'd have the sub-categories of marriage and parenting as my two major roles. So under all these heading I'd evaluate the past year. Then I'd take the same sheet of paper and forecast the year to come, also with very precise details.

As I did this year after year, I became better at it. I began to understand myself better. I knew some of the patterns of my life. What was especially helpful was knowing my limitations. So after doing this a while, I no longer set goals to read 30 books in the year. It became more realistic to read one book a month. And later it was to read just a handful of books, but select them carefully and read them carefully.

Even though I don't do this as often as I've done this in the past, I would still recommend this exercise for everyone at regular intervals of your life. (If you want a copy of the template I use, send me an email and I'll get that to you.) God has designed us for purpose and as a living creature he's designed us for growth. As a human being he's designed us for relational and spiritual growth. I think this is important because as adults we don't have parents to harp on us to change this behavior or that behavior. No one is there to tell us to eat our veggies, and sit up straight and correct our grammar. Part of being an adult is learning self-leadership—doing what we do because we need to do it, because it's in our best interest.

But the bad side of not doing the whole New Year resolution thing any more, is that there is this side of me that's bent toward negativity, doubt and failure. I think we all have this. And it may have a tendency to increase as we get older. We've grown a bit too comfortable in our own skin. We've accepted far too easily that this is who I am, warts and all. We've convinced ourselves that since I've been this way for 10-20 years this is how I'm going to be forever, so why bother changing. Why even bother making the attempt to change. Or because our past failures have so conditioned us, we have convinced ourselves that change is no longer possible.

And coupled with this negativity is pure unadulterated, sinful laziness. It's just too much work to change. It takes too much effort to even begin to make an effort to change, so why bother. It is far easier to stay in bed than to commit to wake at 6am every day. It is far easier to keep potato chips as part of my staple diet than to wean myself from junk food. It is far easier to plop myself in front of the TV or computer than it is to read a non-fiction book.

As you and I begin 2010, I want to challenge you to do something. Throw away all of your past New Years resolution experiences and start fresh. Let's wipe the slate clean. Let's take a fresh look at what God would want for us. You and I, as God's people, are to be guided and directed, we are to orient the way we live our lives, not according to past experiences per say, not according to negativity and failure, not even according to the so-called unlimited potential of the human being. You and I, as God's people, are to live according to the principles God has given to us in the Bible.

For example, several years ago a very popular bracelet became available and sales went through the roof. It was a bracelet that had on it four letters. Do you remember? WWJD. Later, riding on this bandwagon there was another one that didn't catch on as much, FROG (Firmly Rely on God). But the WWJD phrase came from the book by Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps* which was written in 1896. In this book is a story of a church, who under the conviction of God, decided to live life differently. Having in the past just gone through the motions of spirituality, they decided to ask in every situation in life—at work, in relationships, in their personal lives, this question, "In this situation, what would Jesus do?" So one example was, there was an editor of a newspaper who was also a Christian, and he asked the WWJD question to himself as an editor. And so the question was, would Jesus allow for non-ethical, non-moral companies to purchase advertising in a newspaper run by a Christian. Despite the potential loss in revenue, what would Jesus do? And you can see how this would be applied in every situation.

It's a great book but I think it asked the wrong question. I think it oversimplified life and complex issues. I think it promotes a tendency toward self-centered, anti-intellectual, subjective interpretation.

The better question is not WWJD, it's WDBS. What Does the Bible Say? Friends, this is how Jesus modeled his own life. This is the model found in scripture as well. You and I are people of the book. When you and I answer the WWJD question, I bet that 99/100 times it'll begin with "I think...." In the WDBS question, 99/100 times it should and will most likely begin with, "The bible says...." One is very subjective, the other objective. The former has the greater potential for misinterpretation and misapplication than the former.

Perhaps the simplest way Christians are to live their lives is this way.

Read the Bible
Believe the Bible
Obey the Bible

That is a fail-proof method for Christian living. It has a 100% success rate.

And in the bible God calls all of his people to live a life of holiness, which brings us to our ministry theme for 2010.

The bible says that this life of holiness is not optional. It is not open for discussion. It is not an issue for debate. It isn't something to be done only when we feel like it. How many times have you heard it said, or have you said to yourself or to others, when speaking of an aspect of spiritual life, the words, "I feel we should do this or do that..." Or "I didn't want to do this act of obedience because my heart wasn't in it, and if my heart wasn't in it then it wouldn't be sincere, and if it wasn't sincere, then God wouldn't accept it. So I didn't do it." That is the stupidest, self-serving, spiritual life-compromising statement, that comes from the center of sin within us.

Please know these three things about feelings.

1. Feelings, on their own, no matter how sincere, should never drive our actions.
2. Scripture always, every single time, trumps feelings. (Say that to yourself a thousand times.)
3. Scripture driven feelings are the ideal.

Apply anger to each of the three principles above.

1. I might be sincerely angry with you, so because I am sincere in my anger I can cuss you out, or secretly hate you. Or wish venomous thoughts against you and all your future generations. Surely sincerity doesn't make it right.
2. The bible says to be slow to anger. Never let the sun go down in my anger. To not hate a person, let alone murder. To not sin in my anger. To let God avenge, etc. etc. Those scriptures trump my feelings of anger every single time. Those feelings are real. They are there. But we submit them to God and his word.
3. My feelings of anger guided by scripture should be directed at sin and injustice. My anger should glory in the righteousness and justice of God, who will make all wrongs right and will never allow an injustice to go unpunished. I will give myself to causes of justice. I will pursue to become a peacemaker.

Why Pursuing Holiness?

It is not for the purpose of self-improvement. If you want to be holy for self-improvement visit the self-help section of Chapters. Take an advanced degree or certification. Pursuing holiness is not so we can be better people. Ravi Zacharias has this amazing quote, "Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, he came to make dead people live." So much of today's Christian teaching is secular based, self-centered, self-help with a Christian spin.

If you and I pursue holiness for the right reasons, self-improvement will happen for sure, but that must not be the primary reason.

We aren't pursuing holiness just so we could feel better about ourselves. That's just another take on self-improvement from the school of Oprah. Again, by becoming holy, we will absolutely feel better about ourselves. Some voices in our society say, why live according to rules--dated, puritanical, restrictive rules? Why live with guilt? Guilt exists because of rules. So get rid of the rules and live free. That is not the biblical worldview.

You and I are pursuing holiness first and foremost because of God. God is the north on our compass from which we receive all our direction.

Today's passage, which is our theme verse for the year, is the reason we are pursuing holiness. Our pursuit of holiness begins, continues and ends in God.

So this year we will look deeply into this remarkable character of God—his holiness. All of God's attributes are important, but this one, holiness, this one we have to get, we have to understand. We have to allow this to sink deeply within us. Holiness and love might be the two attributes that drive God more than any of the others. Or another way to say it is that holiness and love have underpinnings in all the other attributes of God. So you and I must learn what the first part of this verse means.

“Just as he who called you is holy.”

What does that mean that God is holy? Why does it begin there? What are the implications for my life that God is holy? Our pursuit of holiness must begin with the holiness of God. That is our primary reason.

Secondly, we are pursuing holiness because it is commanded by God. Even if there weren't a whole bunch of bi-products and benefits to a life of holiness we should still pursue it because it is commanded by God. That should, in and of itself, be enough motivation for us. But of course, God is efficient. Not only is he himself holy and not only does he command it, but there are also a bunch of secondary reasons for pursuing holiness.

You and I, our vision of sin has become clouded. Apart from the anchor of God and his word, we will be adrift in our own interpretation of what is wrong and right. And always, always, we lean toward justifying our behaviors. We always portray ourselves in a better light. If you've ever said, “I'm only human” you have justified sin in your life. If you've ever compared your morality to that of others, you've compromised sin behaviors in your life. “I'm better than so and so.” “I'm not as bad as so and so.” “Everyone else does it.” So we want to recapture the biblical teaching on sin and call it like it is.

A lack of holiness will result in spiritual ineffectiveness in so many ways.

- a. hinders intimacy with God.
- b. stifles our effectiveness in ministry.
- c. makes unbelievable our witness
- d. causes doubt in our assurance of Salvation
- e. grieves the Holy Spirit
- f. makes a mockery of the Cross.

And there are others, but those are just to name a few. If you are sick and tired of this, then we must pursue holiness at all costs.

Here's what it will require of each one of us.

Some people think that in our pursuit of holiness that we just lay back until God's Spirit zaps us, gives us the motivation, pulls the trigger and instantaneously makes us holy. That is not biblical holiness.

The journey and attainment of biblical holiness will require of each one of us, the most exertion you and I have ever put forth for any one task. Think of that for which you exerted the most attention, devotion and energy—the achievement of an academic degree, personal fitness, the

pursuit of love, a level of success in your career, the development of your children. I bet at a minimum, hundreds of hours, perhaps thousands, have been sacrificed for those things. For the pursuit of holiness more will be required. Folks, academic degrees are received, personal fitness is attained, children grow up, love relationships happen, promotions are had, but holiness, holiness, is for a lifetime. *We will never achieve it this side of heaven, but we are still called to achieve it this side of heaven.* So you and I can never let down our guard.

Also, we must pursue holiness because the Devil never relents to make us unholy, to tempt us to sin, to live in sin, to remain in sin, and render ourselves useless to God. 1 degree at a time he will move us to being out of sync with God.

We must pursue holiness because the book of Hebrews says that without holiness no one will see the Lord. This can mean both of two things.

The unholy person will not see the Lord, ultimately. The unholy person will not see the Lord ultimately because the unholy person is not a Christian. His or her sins have not been forgiven. The one who makes us holy, the Holy Spirit does not reside in us. In other words, holiness is not a part of the option package of being a Christian.

The unholy Christian will not see the Lord temporally. So you and I Christians, but you and I will instead, live a life with rare glimpses of intimacy with God. But what you and I really need on a daily basis is deep intimacy with God.

So great exertion will be required, but it will be coupled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

Not a single spiritual achievement occurs without both of these things happening in our lives. Think first of our salvation. We repented, we believed, we committed and handed over our lives to God, out of our own free will. Yet, while we did that we did it under the power, influence and direction of the Holy Spirit.

In our Christian marriages, in our Christian parenting, in our Christian teaching, and ministry in church, all of whatever we accomplished was accomplished because we exerted ourselves, but it wasn't standing on that alone, it was the work of God's Holy Spirit within us.

Here is a verse that speaks of this both/and aspect of our faith.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

So in our pursuit of holiness we will be required to exert tremendous personal, but all allow vast amounts of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some specific things we will do to help us in this endeavor.

- *The Pursuit of Holiness* book study
- Ask the Lord to reveal an area or two of sin that I need to deal with this year.
- We will talk about the elephant in the room. Pornography and other common, but taboo sins.
- Accountability in Life Groups
- Scripture Memory on top ten sins (monthly, and fighter verses)

Exodus 15:11

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD ?

Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?

(TOP TEN: anger, materialism/greed, judging others, laziness, lust, lying, pride, selfishness, the tongue, and worry/anxiety/fear)

- Prayer (retreats) (fasting)
- Seminars
- EM Retreat – Jim and Sharon Van Yperen are all about relational holiness.

People of God, by the end of 2010 my hope is that every single one of us will be more obedient in at least one area of our lives.

Folks it is absolutely mandatory that we are holy. Don't throw in the towel already. That's just not an option for us.

