

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- All Christians are called to holiness.
- Growth in holiness is a lifelong pursuit.
- We can overcome obstacles to holiness with the Holy Spirit's help.

You've probably heard the expression, "If you want something, you have to work for it." Like Tom in the story above, we work for the things we really want to achieve. We schedule practice time, ask for help from others, and work at it.

When it comes to living a life like Christ, the same principle applies. If we want a life of holiness, we have to work for it. When you think of the word *holy*, you might think of the pope, the saints, your parish priest, your friends who are always at church or doing volunteer work, but you might not think of yourself. You may be thinking holy is an achievable goal for *them* but not for *me*.

But holiness isn't just for saints and heroes. It doesn't mean being perfect or superhuman. Being holy means standing apart from the crowd, doing what's right even if you're doing it alone. It means doing little things with great love. It means actively growing in intimacy with Christ—even if that takes a lot of practice.

Our Call to Holiness

John was a gifted athlete; it just came naturally to him. But not for his younger brother, Tom. Tom was usually the last one picked when it was time to choose teams, and most of his game time was spent on the bench.

John knew Tom wanted to feel like an important part of the team. So he offered himself to Tom as his personal trainer. The brothers set up a regular backyard practice schedule. John worked diligently with Tom, helping him improve his skills and his attitude. Months passed, and everyone began noticing a new kid on the soccer field. Tom had confidence in himself. He had someone who believed in him—and he was finally in the game.

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Matthew 22:37

- How would you define holiness?
- How were John's actions toward his brother holy?



- What does being holy mean to you?
- Who in your life comes to mind when you think of the word *holy*? Why?



We Are All Called to Holiness

Both the Hebrew and Greek roots of the word *holiness* indicate a separateness, or a life that is set apart for God. As you work toward a holier life, your relationship with Christ will become even more personal. You will become less attached to the stuff of this world and more attached to what Jesus offers you in heaven.

What holiness looks like in the life of one person may not be what holiness looks like in your life. Just think about the variety of lives of the saints. One may be a contemplative nun, another a devout priest, and another the mother of five. Each of these lives would look very different, and the ways each of these saints lived holiness in their day to day lives would be very different, too.

Jesus is made visible in all of these lives, and each of these lives can become a light guiding others to holiness as well. Anyone who pursues goodness, truth, and beauty is seeking God, the source of these things. In each person's unique path to holiness, individual gifts and strengths play a large part.

But our holiness isn't based solely on the things we've done or the rewards and accomplishments we've earned. The source of our holiness, no matter what form it takes, is Christ who sanctified us.

- Where do you see holiness in yourself?
- How can you nurture its growth?



"The Church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is real though imperfect.' In her members perfect holiness is something yet to be acquired: 'Strengthened by so many and such great means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state—though each in his own way—are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect.'"

Me? A Saint?

In the New Testament, the word *saint* is often a synonym for Christians. Because we, as Christians, are called to belong to Jesus Christ, we're called to be saints, set apart in holiness (see Romans 1:6–7). The saints recognized (canonized) by the Church took up this call to be set apart and lived it through the grace and mercy of God. They didn't become saints overnight. They had to work at it. Their lives of holiness took time, effort, and the desire to be as close to God as possible.

The saints grew in the same ways you are called to grow in your faith. They felt the call to holiness within themselves, and they wanted to live their lives in response to that call. They wanted it more than anything else. This desire to live like Jesus occupied their minds and influenced their decisions. This desire was the motivation behind all their daily activities. Whether big or small, every action was focused on God.

We aren't called to be more than human, but we are called to live our humanity as Jesus lived his. That's what sainthood is about, becoming fully human, becoming the person God created us to be.

"Strive...for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Hebrews 12:14

- Is there something in your life you want from the very depths of yourself?
- How is that desire oriented towards holiness?
- How can you align that desire with God's will?



Keeping Holiness on Our Minds

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites....on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing.”

Matthew 23:27–28

If we desire holiness like the saints, we need to keep God at the center of our actions and our thoughts. It’s not enough for us to look holy on the outside if our inner thoughts and attitudes aren’t filled with holiness. If our minds or attitudes are cluttered with feelings that don’t lead us to holiness, or even lead us away from holiness, we’ll have little room to grow.

We not only have to desire to become holy, we have to get rid of anything that stands in our way of holiness.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”

Matthew 5:29–30

- Name something that gets in the way of your desire for holiness.



Being a Christian, a saint, doesn’t mean that goodness just comes to us out of nowhere. We still have to cultivate it, and our faith gives us the grace and guidelines we need to choose goodness and holiness. Sometimes this means we have to leave certain things, habits, and friends behind.

This doesn’t mean those things, habits, or friends were evil (although some of our bad habits can be sinful), but it does mean that they were distractions keeping us from growing. Think about taking a trip. You have a particular destination in mind, and you want to get there. If you took every side road you saw, or stopped traveling and just stayed where you were, you’d never make it to your final destination. It’s the same with holiness. If we stop moving toward it or allow distractions to pull us away, we’ll never get there.

“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.”

2 Corinthians 7:1

- What are some distractions that might keep you from holiness?
- What are some ways you can clear away these distractions?



The Quest for Holiness

Jesus didn’t say holiness would be easy. Actually, he said it was so difficult some people might not even try for it.

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few.”

Matthew 7:13–14

At first glance, this is discouraging. What’s the use of trying for holiness if only a few people succeed in finding it? But there’s another way to look at the “narrow gate”: As a challenge we are all called to meet.

Somewhere within each of us is this narrow opening and the grace, given to us by the Holy Spirit, to enter through it. It might be hidden from us at first, but it’s there. Finding it will be difficult. We will get hurt. We will get discouraged. We will have people tell us we can’t do it or that the reward isn’t worth it.

But through that narrow opening is the wholeness of life, the fullness of love, peace, and joy. We can have it. It’s our birthright as children of God. We just have to desire it with all our hearts and be willing to work for it.

- In what way can the path to holiness be an adventure?



With a partner or on your own, think about the way to holiness as an adventure. What kinds of things would you need to bring with you? What people would you want by your side? Where would this adventure take you?

After you've thought about those questions, make a list, draw a picture, write a story, or anything else you think of, to show what your adventure toward holiness would look like.

Think about your schedule for the upcoming week. What activities do you have coming up? What opportunities for holiness? Are there things you need to add or get rid of to help you keep holiness at the center of your life?



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