

Teacher's Guide for Living Holy

Theme: Holiness in Our Actions

Life Application:

Behaving ourselves in a manner that reflects our commitment to be separate from the world and dedicated to God for His purposes.

Key Verse for Meditation:

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. – 1 Timothy 4:12

Focus Scriptures:

Psalm 101:1-8; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 2 Peter 3:10-14

Lesson Key:

Living a holy life in terms of our conduct is not based on a list of “don’ts.” The admonition, “Be ye holy; for I am holy,” is positive. Also note that the verb *be* is reflected in specific actions. (For example, we know God is holy because of His actions which reflect His nature.) However, we cannot just do holy things; holy actions must flow from our innermost being, which has been transformed and made pure.

Introduction:

The Bible teaches in both general and specific terms. While the Bible identifies certain specific behaviors as sinful, it also outlines general principles for making decisions about our actions. As Christians, we will obviously avoid doing what God’s Word directly prohibits, but we also must learn to apply the general guidelines that are given in Scripture.

Holy living and godly behavior will be a positive witness to the world around us. However, holiness is not primarily for the world to see, but “unto the Lord.” Holiness is not only a separation from sin, but a separation unto God. The resemblance to God must begin in the heart of the believer, or holy living will become only a yoke of bondage or a burden of rules to follow, which is not holy living at all.

God sees more than just our actions: He sees the motives and desires behind our actions. Ultimately, each of our actions and reactions is determined primarily by the motives of our hearts (although human weakness, fatigue, or personal limitations can at times cause our actions to be misdirected or misinterpreted by others). The foundational issue is that if the heart is holy, the actions proceeding out of the heart will be holy.

Opener Ideas/Activities:

The video clip “Light” would be a good opener for this topic. Search for the word “What type of light are you?” at <http://sermoncentral.sermonspice.com>.

To illustrate how our actions impact others, discuss studies about the influence of parents on their children, friends on each other, and even the influence we have on complete strangers. For example, studies on diet show that parents’ eating habits have a huge impact on their children’s eating habits. However, insisting that children eat healthy foods, offering rewards for healthy eating, or putting strict limits on “bad” foods can actually cause them to have worse eating habits. The best way to teach them is by example. Likewise, the best way to encourage children to embrace the Gospel is by doing it ourselves. Another famous study found that if a person walking alone sees someone being the victim of

a crime, he will probably try to help the victim. However, if there are several people around when the crime occurs, people tend to be followers and will only get involved if they witness another person getting involved first. Spiritually speaking, we want to set the good example that others will follow.

Use two magnets labeled “Heavenly Father” and “Satan,” and some paper clips to illustrate the need to avoid temptation so the power of Satan is not strong enough to tempt us into sin. Place the paper clips midway between the magnets. Then nudge some paper clips so they are drawn to the magnetic force of the magnet labeled “Satan.” Explain to the class the danger of making choices that can put them in the wrong place. As we choose the right way and stay close to the Heavenly Father, it is more difficult for the magnetic force labeled “Satan” to attract us.

Show your class a small pebble. Point out that at first glance, we would consider such a small rock to be harmless. Then ask if someone would volunteer to put it in his shoe and keep it there all day. Obviously, even a small rock in your shoe will make a big problem! This illustrates the importance of not regarding our behavior or actions as being of little consequence. We need to avoid the “small things” that would reflect poorly on our Christian testimony, and not ignore them or think they really do not matter.

Tell your class that a basic law of physics is that every action causes a reaction.

- Some reactions attract attention. (Pop a balloon with a pin.)
- Some reactions bring pain. (Show a heated curling iron and discuss grabbing it.)
- Some reactions impact others. (Push down the first of a row of dominoes.)

Point: Our actions always have consequences.

To illustrate the impact of our actions on others, have your students draw a dot on a piece of paper, and then draw a circle around it. Tell them they are represented by the dot. Inside the circle, have them write the names of those they live with or see every day. Have them draw a second, larger circle around the first, and inside that circle, have them put names of friends they see often and associate with regularly. Then a third circle, with names of people they see only occasionally. Ask: Which of these people will have the most reaction to any action you might take?

Put out a mousetrap set with a piece of cheese. Ask your class, “Is anyone here tempted to reach into the trap? What if I put a dime in there? What about a hundred dollar bill?” The point should be made that the devil knows our weak points. He will not bother trying to tempt us with things which do not interest or entice us.

Questions from Student Handout:

1. We read in 2 Corinthians 6:17 that we are to “come out from among them” and be separate. Since we live in this world and must interact with unbelievers on a daily basis, how is it possible to follow this instruction?

The injunction to “be separate” means to insulate ourselves against the mindset, values, and philosophies of the world. In order to do that, we must guard against anything that would dim our vision for Christ, distract us from earnestly seeking to please Him, or cause us to be consumed with temporal concerns. We should refuse to follow the example of unbelievers in the habits, attitudes, recreational pursuits, associations, and attire which are unbecoming to a follower of Christ. The point is that God wants a clear line of demarcation between His children and the world. When we have options, we choose the holy way—for example, who we are with, what we look at, etc.

We will need to pray for God's help to do this. Anytime we talk about living holy, we need to remember that we are dependent upon God for this. We cannot just do holy things; holy actions must flow from our innermost being, which has been transformed and made pure.

2. How can we determine whether a specific action is appropriate for one who is trying to live a holy life? See Romans 12:9; 14:21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 6:14; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:22

Discuss with your class that these verses lead to questions we can ask ourselves when we are trying to make a decision about a specific action.

- *Romans 12:9 – Does it compromise my testimony?*
- *Romans 14:21 – Would it hinder another Christian?*
- *1 Corinthians 10:31 – Will it glorify God?*
- *2 Corinthians 5:10 – Do I want to face it in the Judgment?*
- *2 Corinthians 6:14 – Does it involve the wrong company?*
- *Colossians 3:17 – Can it be done in Jesus' name?*
- *1 Thessalonians 5:22 – How will it appear to others?*

Point out to your class that the Bible teaches in both general and specific terms. Sometimes it describes specific acts that are not consistent with holy living, while at other times it lays out general principles for our conduct. Consistent Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15) is required in order to familiarize ourselves with both general and specific guidelines. Clearly we should avoid what God's Word directly prohibits, but we must also learn and apply general principles to determine right from wrong. At times, we will need to pray for guidance on applying these principles. If we are sensitive to God's Spirit and the checks He gives, He will give us direction.

3. How should the concept of separation (2 Corinthians 6:17) and dedication to God (Romans 12:1) impact our conduct and actions?

Class discussion may bring up some of the following thoughts.

- *When our hearts are holy, we want what we do to glorify God, and we should filter everything accordingly. Thus, we will evaluate potential actions in this light.*
- *Because everyone around us is not holy, we will not be doing or saying what everyone else is doing or saying.*
- *The sanctified heart is continually seeking after God and His will, so our actions and conduct must fit into God's will for us, as delineated in His Word.*
- *Sanctified individuals cultivate a close walk with God in spirit, soul, mind, and body, and thus will turn away from any behavior which would not align with holiness.*

4. How should we respond if God reveals to us that some action of ours is not pleasing to Him? See Hebrews 12:9-11.

We need to stop that action, thank God for teaching us, tell God that we are sorry, and purpose not to do that anymore. We will need to ask God for help to hold onto that purpose. Hebrews 12:9-11 is a helpful reference. Because we are God's children, He will correct us. Be sure your students understand that we cannot excuse sin; these steps relate to shortcomings or errors made in human weakness, not a direct and defiant knowledgeable act of wrongdoing.

Sanctified individuals have an intense desire to correct personal shortcomings. When we see some shortcoming in our lives, rather than resisting the reminder or check of the Lord, our response should be to immediately go to Him in prayer and say, "God, help me to do better next time, because I love You with all my heart, and I want to please You in every way." That deeply-rooted desire to please the Lord describes sanctification.

5. Christ commanded His followers to be perfect (Matthew 5:48), and at times, the phrases “Christian perfection” and “perfect love” are used in connection with sanctification or holiness. How can a person really be perfect in this world?

It is important to understand the meaning of the word “perfection.” This is not absolute perfection—absolute perfection belongs to God alone. It is not Adamic perfection, such as Adam enjoyed before the Fall. It is not a perfection of our faculties—as long as we live, we will be impacted by the frailties and limitations that come with mortality. The phrase “Christian perfection” refers to the standard of life imparted to sanctified believers. Sanctification provides a perfect heart—a state of living in which a person loves the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and deeds are motivated by devotion to God.

Point out that, ultimately, each of our actions and reactions is determined primarily by the motives of our hearts. Human weakness, fatigue, limitations, etc., obviously can cause our actions to be misdirected or misinterpreted by others, but the foundational issue is that the heart must be holy for the actions proceeding out of that heart to be holy. The fact that one is sensitive and responsive to the Lord’s instruction and guidance regarding shortcomings is indicative of Christian perfection.

6. What behaviors would you expect to see in the life of a person who is truly dedicated to God? What behaviors would you expect not to see?

As you discuss your students’ answers, you could make two lists. Expected behaviors might include a meek and quiet spirit, honesty, reliability, regular church attendance, prayer, concern for others. Behaviors we would not expect to see might include unkindness, short tempers, dishonesty, immorality, gossip, holding a grudge—opposites of the other list.

This is a good opportunity to discuss the impact of our actions upon our Christian testimonies. Some, even in religious circles, say that outward actions are not important; that God sees and judges the heart, which is all that matters. However, Matthew 7:17-20 contradicts this false teaching. While it is true that God looks on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7), God’s Word also points out that the “fruit” of a person’s life—in other words, what others see—is how those looking on will determine our spiritual condition. Our conduct is an indicator of what is on the inside. Those around us see the way we treat others, the places we go, and the things we do. If our Christian testimonies are to have the desired effect on others, everything about us must back them up.

Additional Questions:

Paul admonished Timothy, “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Notice that he did not say “to the believers” but “of the believers.” The word *conversation* in this verse is not limited to speech only; in the original language, it actually means “manner of life, behavior, conduct.” Who are some of the Gospel veterans you have known whose manner of life has been an inspiration to you and why?

The examples shared by your class should be an encouragement to your group to model themselves after these Gospel veterans who have set such a good example.

The Bible says, “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (Romans 14:21; see also 1 Corinthians 8:7-13). This suggests that we should not partake of things that would cause another Christian to stumble in his faith—even if we know that the thing is not displeasing to God. Given the diversity of practices among different cultures, generations, families, etc., how concerned should we be about our own practices offending another group?

We should be sensitive to the concerns of other Christians, especially new converts who may be more susceptible to the tricks of the devil. This does not mean we should live in fear of offending another, for if we follow God's leading, He will help us know when to refrain from activities that could cause confusion. Ultimately, all Christians must realize the difference between critical doctrinal practices, and superficial cultural practices.

Why might it be a bad idea to gauge our actions by the actions of other Christians?

We should not gauge our actions by others' actions because we know they can make mistakes, and also because we must ultimately give God our own account for our decisions.

How will holiness be reflected in:

Our attitude toward God's Word?

Our attitude toward our enemies?

Our attitude toward our job?

Our attitude toward suffering?

Our attitude toward others?

These questions should generate discussion and examples in your class. In addition, you might want to use the following references:

Our attitude toward God's Word — Job 23:12; Psalm 119:103

Our attitude toward our enemies — Matthew 5:44

Our attitude toward our job — Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1

Our attitude toward suffering — Matthew 5:11; 1 Peter 4:12-13

Our attitude toward others — Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 1:22

Why should Christians be concerned about worldliness?

God says it is destructive to the soul. Jesus set the example of a lifestyle different from the world's lifestyle, illustrating that we are expected to be different from the world. Our spiritual adversary is the god of this world, and he will use the influences of the world to attack us.

What effect does our holiness have on those around us?

Discussion should bring out that sometimes a holy life will cause others to be convicted, and they may react by being less than nice. At other times, a holy life may prompt others to behave better themselves. The hope would be that our holy living would spark a desire in other hearts to seek God. Our choice to live a holy life can encourage and challenge those around us.

Your students might have some interesting experiences to share regarding this question.

How might our conduct and actions be impacted by close association with worldly influences?

If we are not careful, worldly influences will "rub off" on us. However, holiness and godliness do not "rub off" on anyone; they come only when we ask God for them. We do not want our sensitivity to God and His Spirit dulled by the influences of the world. "Close association" in this question supposes a choice. We want to choose actions that will promote holiness, not deter it.

Name some "avenues" through which "the world" might begin to infiltrate our Christian lives without us realizing it. What can we do to prevent this?

No doubt your class will suggest items such as advertisements, entertainment, an attitude of apathy or laziness. Resisting the influences of the world takes vigilance and prayer.

Word Search:

When Paul told the younger man, Timothy, that he was to be an example of the believers “in conversation” (1 Timothy 4:12) he was not referring to verbal discourse. The word translated *conversation* means “behavior.” Paul gave a similar exhortation to the believers at Philippi, when he instructed them, “Only let your conversation [behavior] be as it becometh [is worthy of] the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). The Apostle Peter sounded the same refrain when he said, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation” (1 Peter 1:15).

Supplemental Resources:

- “Love Not the World” by Anne Green, *Higher Way* Vol.90-5
- “Practical Holiness” by Arthur O’Hare, *Higher Way* Vol.89-3
- “What Would Jesus Do?” by Lori Arechy, *Higher Way* Vol. 88-3
- “Live Your Testimony!” by Cheryl Paulsen, *Higher Way* Vol.88-1
- “Convicted by Testimony on the Job” by Hollis (Chic) Beasley