

A New Year of Holiness

Study Guide for Small Group Discussion and Personal Application
Lynn Haven UMC – December 20, 2020 – Pastor Craig Carter

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Today is the fourth and final Sunday in Advent. During the Advent season Lynn Haven UMC is reading a devotional titled “The Christian New Year” by J.D. Walt. For more information visit LynnHavenChristmas.com.

When you think of religious words associated with Christmas you likely think of joy, hope, or peace. But what about holy? Christmas is literally a “holy – day.” Holiness is a common theme in the gospel account of Jesus’ birth, and an important piece of our identity as Jesus followers. Today we consider what holiness is, and what it looks like in the life of a believer.

“You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” - Leviticus 19:2 NLT

The wasteland will rejoice and blossom. Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy! There the Lord will display his glory, the splendor of our God. He is coming to save. And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness...and will satisfy the thirsty land. And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. It will be only for those who walk in God’s ways... (Isaiah 35 NLT excerpts)

Jesus’ earthly ministry brought healing, restoration, renewal, reconciliation – and opened for us the way of holiness. During this time before Christ returns, we are called to travel the road of holiness. The way we get there is not by our own efforts. Holiness is primarily God’s work in us through the Holy Spirit, but we do have a role to play. These are specific ways we can pursue holiness, as seen in the characters in the Christmas story.

1) Complete Obedience

*[Joseph] did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.
- Matthew 1:24 NLT*

While holiness is more than rigidly following a set of rules, it does involve some standards, since God’s expectations of our behavior are different than those of the world. Partial obedience is still disobedience.

2) Comprehensive Faith

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." - Luke 1:38 NLT

Scripture teaches that we are to "walk by faith, not by sight", but most of us do not live this way in our daily lives. We tend to rely on ourselves and what we can accomplish rather than trusting God and what He can do. Real faith means depending on God completely, each and every day, for everything.

3) Concentrated Love

"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...[and] love your neighbor as yourself." - Matthew 22:37, 39 NLT

Jesus made life relatively simple by giving us one command to follow. As author, Francis Frangipane, puts it, "A holy life is a life alive with love, compelled by love, filled with love." Holiness means loving like God loves, not by giving an expensive gift, but by giving of ourselves.

Conclusion

⇒ Is there some area of partial obedience or even total disobedience in your life? What would total obedience look like for you?

⇒ Where are you on the continuum of walking by faith or by sight? Is there any area where you need to trust God more completely?

⇒ What can you do, during this special time of the year, to demonstrate concentrated, pure love for God and for those around you?

Our Father in heaven, thank you for these days of Advent and this new year in Christ. Your holiness is filled with love and your love is filled with holiness. Come, Holy Spirit, fill our lives with complete obedience, comprehensive faith, and concentrated love so we can be holy as the Lord our God is holy. Transform this special season into true holy days so that we might become more like Christ – the one who came, is here, and is coming again. Amen.