

THE HEIGHT OF OUR HOLINESS

Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. (1 Peter 1:15, NIV)

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I'M STILL WAITING to play my perfect round of golf. By this I certainly don't mean 18 birdies. That is the stuff of fantasy. I just mean a round where I look back and say, "Not *one shot*. I can't find *one shot* I could have saved. I hit it well and made every reasonable putt. Even the putts I didn't make, I hit where I wanted to." I don't know what that would add up to on the scorecard, but I'd be happy to call that round perfect.

A golfing friend, who is a fine player, told me recently that he has quit keeping score. He found that the game is a deceiver. You can hit it well and post only an average score, while other times you can slop it around, make a few big putts, and call the score a good one. This didn't satisfy him, so now he plays to hit good shots, as many as he can. I don't know what he'd call a perfect round, but it sounds like he'd get there even more easily than I would.

And then there are those whose perfect round looks more like what is called "a perfect day." It has little to do with the golf and much to do with camaraderie, conversation, and climate.

I suppose it would be nice if we could read God's call to holiness and interpret it the same way—that is, according to our own standard. By this measure, we could be as holy as we want to be and call it holy enough. The trouble is it's never written that way in Scripture. In the Bible, we are almost always told to be holy in direct connection to the standard we are given: "as God is holy."

A large portion of the Old Testament law was required of God's people in order to set them apart, to cause them to stand out in the midst of the peoples around them. By this, they would reflect the holiness of the LORD rather than the idolatry of their neighbors. So God told his people to "consecrate yourselves and be holy" (Leviticus 11:44). This consecration includes nuances of dedication and also of majesty. The man or woman who endeavors to be holy because (or as) God is holy is reaching for a height of righteousness that is anything but standard.

In the New Testament, the reminder comes through Peter. We are to be holy, and again the measure is God himself. This is the highest standard—unreachable, in fact. But the holy God maintains mercy in his holiness. He will work with you. Now, are you willing to work with him? That's a very big question for us all.

Opening questions How would you describe a 'perfect round' of golf? Have you ever played one? • In your mind, what is the most daunting aspect of God's call to holiness?

READING Luke 18:9-14 & James 4:10; Colossians 3:5-14

Humility and holiness (Luke 18 & James 4)

In what ways does Jesus' parable get your attention? With the parable's outcome in mind, why is it critical that humility underlies our holiness? How does the James verse extend this thinking and include the idea of reaching for a height of holiness via humility?

Defining holiness (Colossians 3)

The first portion of this passage (vv. 5-9) describes characteristics that must be "put to death." What are some of these characteristics and why should they no longer define us (see verse 10)?

The second portion of this passage (vv. 12-14) describes characteristics with which we should "clothe ourselves." List some of these. How does the putting off and putting on of these qualities move us closer to God's holiness?

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