

THE WAY OF HOLINESS

group leader's guide

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Contents

About This Guide	4
Week 1. The Tempting of Holiness	5
Week 2. The Awful Mystery of the Holiness of God	7
Week 3. The Trivialization of Sin and the Death of Conscience	9
Week 4. The Power and Joy of True Repentance	11
Week 5. Salvation through the Spectacles of Holiness	13
Week 6. What Is Entire Sanctification?	15
Week 7. The Frustration and Hope of Entire Sanctification	17
Week 8. Innocence through Guilt	19
Week 9. The Sanctification of the Mind	21
Week 10. When and How We Are Sanctified	23
Week 11. Habits of the Holy	25



About This Guide

This study takes a realistic look at holiness, often called sanctification. It portrays holiness not as a single step but as a journey, in which the Holy Spirit transforms the sincere, obedient believer into the likeness of Christ.

As you pursue this study, you and your group will profit from eleven weeks of focused Bible study and helpful interaction. At the end of the study, you will understand more keenly what true holiness is and have the tools to fashion your lives after the life of Jesus, who epitomized genuine holiness.



week 1

The Tempting of Holiness

To the Facilitator

Welcome your group members to this eleven-week study of *The Way of Holiness* by Steve DeNeff. Let them know you want every session to be informal and helpful. Tell them you value everyone's input and will not censure or ridicule any statement or question. Share brief information about your personal background, and then ask each person to volunteer his or her name and tell what he or she hopes to gain from this study.

Focus on God's Word

In the first chapter of *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff contends the supreme danger of our day is that the people of God might grab on to one or more “moral hot potatoes and spend all their energies pushing it forward, somehow believing that this is the hope of the gospel” (p. 11). Examples of “moral hot potatoes” are abortion and the fact that prayer and creationism have been banned from public schools. He underscores the Christians' desire to get condoms out of our schools and liberals out of the Supreme Court. Another driving concern of Christians is to elect a president or prime minister who prays to our God.

DeNeff argues that we must not substitute moral reform or revivalism for holiness. He insists that neither moral reform, “the attempt to hijack the culture and make it more conservative,” nor revivalism, “the assumption that religion ought to be more emotional, more appealing, and more spontaneous . . . is the goal of heaven or the agenda of the church” (p. 12).

So what does result in holiness, and what is the business of the church?

Before returning to heaven, Jesus commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel throughout the world (Mark 16:15). The gospel has the power to transform sinners into saints—new creations—making them holy in Christ and progressively holy in their walk with him (Rom. 15:15–16; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15–16).

First Corinthians 15:3–5 defines the gospel as the good news that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and was seen in his resurrection body.

The business of the church is to proclaim the gospel and not get sidetracked from it. We must not abandon our main task for secondary causes, no matter how noble those causes are. Neither moral reform nor emotional religion void of the gospel can lift the culture to God. The culture changes for the good to the extent that individuals receive the gospel and believe in Christ as Savior.

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that grabbing onto a “moral hot potato” as the hope of the gospel is a supreme danger?
2. Do you think much of today’s worship is too emotional, not emotional enough, or just about right? Defend your answer.
3. Read Romans 1:16. Why was the apostle Paul unashamed of the gospel?
4. What are the essential components of the gospel?
5. In what sense does holiness occur at salvation?
6. What social sins concern you most? Why?
7. What do you think is the culture’s most dominant opinion of Christians? What do you think has contributed to this opinion?
8. Why do you agree that emotionalism in religion might obscure the gospel?
9. How does morality differ from holiness?
10. How does the gospel serve as the foundation on which the Holy Spirit builds holiness in a saved person’s life?

Wrap-Up

Distribute slips of paper and pencils to the group members. Instruct them to write, “I will not let the following moral issues distract me from the gospel.” Have them list below what those issues are.



The Awful Mystery of the Holiness of God

To the Facilitator

Ask whether the group believes modern Christianity tends to reduce God to an almost human level. Explain that this session challenges us to view God as holy, just, and uncompromising. As Steve DeNeff states in *The Way of Holiness*, “The God of the Bible . . . is unapproachable light, exposing our sins and condemning whatever sin he does not cleanse” (p. 27).

Focus on God’s Word

In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff advances the premise that many Christians have created a God who suits their liking. His children “are free to define him in any way they please” (p. 26). DeNeff argues that this view of God forfeits the doctrine of the holiness of God. Therefore, there is no law—no standard—and we are subject to popular consensus or the special interests of a few. This rejection of God’s law marks us as similar to the Israelites who lived in the times of the judges, when “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 21:25).

Without a standard, sin ceases to be sin. It becomes “only dysfunction, addiction, abnormal behavior, unhappiness, or alternative lifestyles” (*The Way of Holiness*, p. 29). When we cease to view God as holy and hold his standard, we see no reason to change our behavior. Also, we see no reason to share the gospel, which is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). In addition, if God is not much different from us, why should we accept his teachings and commit ourselves to them? Because God is holy and uncompromising, we need a correct view of him and a commitment to serve him in holiness.

God’s holiness sets him apart from humanity. Isaiah’s vision of God as high and lifted up makes this fact clear (Isa. 6:1–6). When Isaiah saw God as he is—holy and seated upon a throne—he saw himself as he was—sinful and in need of cleansing.

However, God participates in human affairs. He was deeply concerned about his people in Egypt and commissioned Moses to lead them to freedom. He responded to Isaiah and gave him a message to communicate to his people and to Gentile nations. Of course the incarnation of God in Jesus clearly shows how involved God became in our need for redemption and reconciliation (John 1:14; 2 Cor. 5:19). Being holy as God is holy mandates that we get involved in meeting the spiritual plight of the human race (2 Cor. 5:19–20).

Holiness is also purity. First Peter 1:14–15 exhorts us not to conform to evil desires but to be holy in all that we do. Ephesians 5:27 points out the fact that Christ loved us and died for us to present us to “himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Holiness also includes passion. God is passionate about saving the lost (John 3:16; Matt. 23:37), and we should share in his passion.

On page 45 of *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff offers a compelling quote from A. W. Tozer. In 1961 Tozer said, “I believe we ought to have again the old biblical concept of God which makes God awful and makes men lie face down and cry, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.’ . . . That would do more for the church than everything or anything else.”¹

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. How do you define holiness?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that there is a tendency today to humanize God?
3. What do you believe is a biblical view of God?
4. Why does the church need a biblical view of God?
5. How can holy Christians participate in the culture without compromising their holiness?
6. Do you think moral absolutes are necessary? Why or why not?
7. What do you see as the most dangerous threats to personal purity?
8. How might a believer carve out time to regularly be alone with God?

Wrap-Up

Have group members think about their calendars or pull them out. Challenge them to schedule time with God and make an appointment or reminder.

Note

1. A. W. Tozer, “Worship: the Missing Jewel in the Evangelical Church,” in *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, comp. Warren Wiersbe (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1978), 219.



The Trivialization of Sin and the Death of Conscience

To the Facilitator

Welcome your group by asking how the past week went for them. This session focuses on the current phenomenon of minimizing sin. Sometime during the session you may wish to divide the group into smaller groups and have them discuss the questions provided. (Some people may be more comfortable and inclined to share in a smaller group.)

Focus on God's Word

Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector who prayed in the temple (Luke 18:9–14). The Pharisee boasted about his self-righteousness, but God did not justify him. The tax collector, on the other hand, knew he was a sinner, and therefore prayed, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (v. 13). God responded to the tax collector’s admission of personal sin and forgave him. It is far more common in our culture to follow the example of the Pharisee than that of the tax collector.

In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff explains, “So, as a rule, the less we think of God, the better we think of ourselves. If God is the jolly good fellow we think he is, we have less to feel sorry for and nothing to fear. So the doctrines of holiness and sin either rise or fall together. What we do to the one, we have done—whether knowingly or unknowingly—to the other” (p. 48). Obviously, the tax collector perceived that God is holy. He, therefore, by contrast saw himself as unholy—sinful.

We must not explain away our sin or blame it on anything but our own fallen nature. Jesus taught this truth in Mark 7:21–23. The apostle Paul explained that those who live according to the sinful nature “have their minds set on what the flesh desires” (Rom. 8:5). It seems the more notice we have that a certain act is wrong, the more we want to commit it. (See Rom. 7:19 and Gal. 5:17 to learn Paul’s indictment of the sin nature.)

The Devil works through the sin nature to blind us to the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4), but God can lift the blindness and let us see ourselves as he sees us (Acts 16:14; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10). Our responsibility, then, is twofold: (1) We must acknowledge our sin and guilt and repent; and (2) We must share the gospel freely in a culture that trivializes sin and silences the conscience.

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that there is a cultural trend to minimize sin?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that there is a trend among Christians to minimize sin?
3. When someone commits a crime, who or what is the offender likely to blame?
4. Why do you agree or disagree that an overemphasis on tolerance contributes to a trivialization of sin?
5. How would you respond to the statement, “I can’t help it if I have a bad temper. I was born that way”?
6. Have you heard anyone excuse another person’s sin by saying, “Who am I to judge?” How do you respond to that comment?
7. Are Christians helpless in their struggle with the sinful nature? Why or why not?
8. What does it mean to repent? Have you experienced or seen genuine repentance? If so, what resulted from it?

Wrap-Up

End this session with silent prayer. Encourage each person to examine his or her heart and repent of any evil lurking there.



The Power and Joy of True Repentance

To the Facilitator

We hear many apologies these days. They come from politicians, sports stars, entertainers, and others, but how many of them reflect repentance? This session helps us know what true repentance is and what results from it.

Focus on God's Word

"I want to apologize to any who felt offended by what I said." This is often the kind of apology we hear, but it doesn't express repentance. It doesn't admit that what was said was wrong. Nor does it express sorrow for having said what was wrong. In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff says, "Repentance is a well-aimed missile into the heart of our sinful nature. When we admit a sin, we eat a little crow. We say that whoever confronted us was right" (p. 63). He goes on to elaborate on the meaning of repentance: "Repentance is neither sorrow without change, nor change without sorrow. It is sorrow with intent to change" (pp. 63–64).

Repentance moves the sinner toward salvation. It is associated in the Old Testament with emotion and resolve (Gen. 6:7; Ex. 13:17). The New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*, meaning "to change one's mind." Jesus commanded, "Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15), and warned, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3).

In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff cites several factors associated with true repentance: conviction; abhorrence of sin; acceptance of consequences, as in the case of the penitent prodigal (Luke 16:17–19) and the repentant thief on the cross (23:41). False repentance, according to DeNeff, glosses over the transgression, tries to avoid the consequences (1 Sam. 15:30; Acts 8:24), continues the wrong behavior, simply promises to do better, and does not practice perpetual self-examination.

True repentance exposes the problem and trusts God to remove it, and he does so (Isa. 6:5–7). It also marks a new beginning (Rom. 14:17). After Isaiah received cleansing for his lips, he spoke God's message with uncompromising conviction (see, Isa. 28:14, 16).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. What difference, if any, do you see between confession and repentance?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that repentance is only for unbelievers seeking salvation?
3. What might a repentant person need to change his or her mind about?
4. How would you describe false repentance?
5. Read Psalm 51:1–4. What elements of true repentance do you find in this passage?
6. On page 66 of *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff says, “Pseudo-conversions fill our churches and our leadership.” Why do you agree or disagree with this statement?
7. Do you think true repentance is a lifelong experience in the Christian life? Why or why not?

Wrap-Up

Distribute paper and pencils to the group members and instruct them to list as many benefits of true repentance as they can in three minutes. After three minutes, have volunteers share their answers.



Salvation through the Spectacles of Holiness

To the Facilitator

This session provides a good opportunity to challenge group members to examine their hearts regarding salvation. Be available afterward to help an unsaved member repent and believe in Jesus.

Focus on God's Word

Have we compromised the message of salvation in our desire to bring souls to the Lord? Steve DeNeff thinks we have. He writes on page 77 of *The Way of Holiness*: “It occurs to me that maybe we have come to preach a kind of junk-mail evangelism in the land of opportunity” (p. 77). He claims we often pay more attention to the package of our message than to its content, and makes the point that God must work in a sinner’s heart to prepare him or her for the gospel. God must convict the sinner (2 Tim. 2:25), know the sinner (Matt. 7:23), and guide the sinner to the truth (John 16:13).

We cannot take credit for our conversion. God alone extended the invitation to be saved. He saves us by grace alone through faith, and we are his workmanship (Eph. 2:8–10). If we take any credit for our salvation, we show a low appreciation for God’s work in saving us. If we think we can produce our own holiness, we are mistaken. Those who cling to such self-reliance are often shaky about their salvation.

In Ephesians Paul credited God with our salvation. God saved us “for the praise of his glory” not ours (Eph. 1:12). God has chosen us, and he loves us enough to transform us. Therefore, change accompanies true conversion. We become “holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1:4), and God predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

As God’s chosen ones, we are separated for his purposes. We ought to conduct ourselves as members of God’s family and no longer as members of the evil world system. God lifted us out of the evil world system in order to serve as his holy ambassadors to the world.

DeNeff offers a significant challenge to us: “To be chosen by God is to be the object of his love. It is to link up with a long chain of godly men and women, from Abraham to the present and in all countries of the world, whose destiny is holiness. It is to comprehend that, as the very offspring of God, I am singled out to bear his name and to wear his image ‘for the praise of his glory’” (*The Way of Holiness*, p. 92).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Can a Christian take any credit for his or her salvation? Why or why not?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that you are saved because God chose you to salvation?
3. How do you reconcile free will and divine choice?
4. Is it possible to be holy without behavioral change? Why or why not?
5. Why do you agree or disagree that God loves you just the way you are?
6. In what sense are believers not of this world?
7. In what ways do you believe the gospel is being watered down to appeal to a wide audience?

Wrap-Up

Conclude this session by having the group read or sing “O to Be Like Thee.”



What Is Entire Sanctification?

To the Facilitator

Distribute paper and pencils to the members of your group. Ask each person to anonymously provide a brief definition of entire sanctification. Collect the definitions and read them aloud. This session will explore the meaning of entire sanctification.

Focus on God's Word

Steve DeNeff explains entire sanctification as purity of heart. He writes, “The Bible says our hearts can be purified from every selfish desire and liberated to love God with all our soul, mind, and strength; and then to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30–31). This, and nothing less, is entire sanctification. So purity of heart is the heart of the matter” (*The Way of Holiness*, p. 100).

Loving God with a pure heart means we know him, trust him even when answers to prayer don't seem to arrive, desire him, and welcome him into every situation (see Job 13:15; 19:25; Ps. 42:1–2; Prov. 3:5–6). To love our neighbors with a pure heart means we will put their interests ahead of our own (Phil. 2:3), have no prejudice (James 2:1), tolerate difficult individuals (1 Pet. 3:16), truly love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44), and forgive our offenders and trust God to execute justice (Luke 10:35; Rom. 12:19).

Our sanctification—purity or holiness—relates directly to the condition of our minds. As DeNeff says in *The Way of Holiness*, “We think Christianly (Phil. 2:5). We do not dwell on evil thoughts (Ps. 19:14). . . . We take every thought captive—not just some of them—and make it obedient to the lordship of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). . . . We not only read the Word of God, but we also love it (Ps. 119:97)” (pp. 103–104).

God has called us to lead a holy life (1 Thess. 4:7), and this life is possible. We will never reach a place in this life where we no longer need to grow spiritually (2 Pet. 3:18), but we can live a life that pleases God and exudes love for him.

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that entire sanctification should be the goal of every Christian?
2. Do you think a gossiping Christian is entirely sanctified? Why or why not?
3. Do you think it is possible to truly love our neighbors as ourselves? Defend your answer.
4. What sources of evil try to keep our thoughts from becoming pure?
5. How might a concerned Christian guard against these evil influences?
6. In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff claims that “most who profess to be entirely sanctified aren’t” (p. 113). Why do you agree or disagree with this?
7. If you know anyone you believe to be entirely sanctified, what evidence in that person’s life have you observed?

Wrap-Up

Have volunteers complete the following statement: “An entirely sanctified Christian is . . .”



The Frustration and Hope of Progressive Sanctification

To the Facilitator

Many believers may be dissatisfied with their progress in holiness. Perhaps some or all of the members of your group can identify with that feeling. This session addresses this subject and offers valuable help for moving forward in the Christian life.

Focus on God's Word

In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff compares progress in the Christian life to that of a bicyclist who pedals hard up one hill only to find another hill ahead. DeNeff views many churchgoers as “dead in Christ” (pp. 116–117), meaning that their beliefs are orthodox but they lack enthusiasm; they are apathetic and unproductive. These people resemble the Ephesians, to whom Jesus issued a criticism and a challenge. He said they had left their first love, and they needed to remember from where they had fallen, to repent, and to do the first works (Rev. 2:4–5).

Believers in a second group, DeNeff points out, know they are “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6 KJV), but they also know they are not perfect. “Their security,” DeNeff writes, “is based on their intimacy with God” (p. 117).

The third group of believers sincerely worship and long for a deep faith in God, but their efforts to advance in the Christian life leave them frustrated. DeNeff says, “Some quit and go to the bottom. Others plod on” (p. 119).

We ought to realize that the path to holiness is not a single step but a long journey. The journey is called progressive sanctification. As we obey God's Word and abide in Christ, the Holy Spirit gradually conforms us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

The first stage of the Christian life is the “blessed assurance” stage, in which we know God has forgiven us and given us a personal relationship with himself (Eph. 1:5–7). In this stage, new believers desire biblical knowledge as a baby craves milk (1 Pet. 2:2).

In the second stage, the “settling in” stage, believers decide to break old habits, but their focus on Christ and the Scriptures grows dimmer while their focus on books, radio, TV, and study groups grows stronger. These believers need to depend on the Spirit for understanding and guidance (John 14:16, 25–26).

In the third stage, “a growing restlessness,” believers become frustrated with themselves and their shortcomings. They know they are not perfect, but they want to be.

The fourth stage, that some refer to as “entire sanctification,” may be called “complete devotion to God and holiness.” The false notion here is that God’s power can always be reduced to a single experience. It may or may not happen with a single experience.

According to DeNeff, the fifth stage may be called “we earnestly desire what we already possess.” He contends, “We are not absolutely perfect any more than one can be absolutely full of either food or love” (p. 131).

As we advance in holiness, we need to put aside hypocrisy, stay focused on the two greatest commandments, and seek God’s power daily, because he works out our salvation. We should also remember that Jesus is both the author and the perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. What might cause a new believer to become frustrated about his spiritual progress?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that hypocrisy sometimes accompanies a profession of entire sanctification?
3. Is a believer’s sanctification entirely dependent upon God, the believer, or the believer’s cooperation with the Holy Spirit? Explain your answer.
4. Why do you agree or disagree that a believer might become so interested in religious books and/or radio programs that he or she neglects God and his Word?
5. What advice would you give a new believer who asked you how to be holy?
6. In which stage of the Christian life do you think most Christians fall? Why?
7. How can a believer seek God’s power daily?

Wrap-Up

Allow some time for personal introspection and prayer about progress in the Christian life. Challenge members of the group to make an important decision regarding their progress and carry out the decision in the coming week.



week 8

Innocence through Guilt

To the Facilitator

Our system of law assumes a person is innocent until proven guilty. The Bible, however, teaches that we are all guilty and need to be forgiven. This session tackles the subject of innocence and guilt.

Focus on God's Word

The writer to the Hebrews called upon his readers and to “throw off . . . the sin that so easily entangles” (Heb. 12:1). It seems every Christian has a besetting sin that keeps him or her from reaching the goal of being fully holy. Of course some believers deny their sinful acts or rationalize them in one way or another. They may say, “To err is human,” or “Everybody does it.” Others accept the fact that they sin daily and are sinners as well as saints.

The Bible teaches that everyone is born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and is unrighteous (Rom. 3:10), but God wants us to leave our sinful nature rather than continue in it (John 8:11; 1 John 2:1; 3:9). But what should we do when we sin?

We need to realize that guilt is the path to innocence. We must acknowledge our guilt; otherwise, we have no fellowship, and we deceive ourselves. If we claim we have no sin, God's Word is not in us. However, God is able to purify us—cleanse us—from sin (John 1:6–10; 2:1). In *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff explains: “It is as possible to be freed from sin as it was once possible to be deceived by it, for ‘sin shall not be [our] master’ (Rom. 6:14). Guilt and innocence go together but not as competitors. One is the way into the other” (p. 144).

As we face our sin and guilt, we must not cover our sin. We ought to confess it and receive forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:6, 9). But what does “confess” mean? It means far more than to offer a simple admission of guilt. It means to agree with God's Spirit about our sin. We present a full disclosure of our sin and blame no one but ourselves without trying to cover up anything (Ps. 51:3–4). We also ask God to search us and cleanse us (Ps. 139:23–24) so that we do not commit the sin again.

However, even cleansed believers sin occasionally. When that happens, we need to realize Jesus intercedes for us (1 John 2:1). We need to choose the company of good, helpful friends because “bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor. 15:33), but “as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17). And we are to confess our sins to others (James 5:16).

The most effective way to deal with sin is to love the Lord as we should. If we truly love him, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15), “put to death the misdeeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13), and say no to ungodliness (Titus 2:13).

God wants us to be sanctified (1 Thess. 5:23), but sanctification is not a legalistic requirement. It comes as we apply God’s Word to the sin problem and the challenges of daily life (John 17:17).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that every Christian has at least one besetting sin?
2. Do you think it is a good thing to feel guilty? Why or why not?
3. What excuses for sinning have you heard people give? Do you think those excuses are valid?

Why or why not?

4. Sin is often called a mistake. Do you think the word *mistake* is a suitable synonym for *sin*?

Why or why not?

5. Read Psalm 32:3–4. How did covering up his sins affect David?

6. Why do you agree or disagree that believers may suffer physically when they cover up their sins?

7. How might guilt lead to innocence?

8. What does it mean to truly confess sin?

9. How is your understanding of sin different from what it was before you became a believer?

10. DeNeff claims sanctification is not a legalistic requirement. Why do you agree or disagree with his claim?

Wrap-Up

Divide people into two groups. Have one group tell what they believe the negative factors of guilt are. Have the other group tell what they believe the positive factors of guilt are.



week 9

The Sanctification of the Mind

To the Facilitator

The United Negro College Fund uses the quote: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” It certainly is, especially if a believer fails to submit his or her mind to God for his sanctifying ministry. This session engages in the study of the mind from a scriptural perspective.

Focus on God’s Word

Video cameras seem to be everywhere: at intersections, in homes, in stores, and in schools. Burglars, assassins, and traffic violators may think they perform their lawless acts in secret, but the camera catches them red-handed. However, a camera cannot film what takes place in the mind. What we may think are secret thoughts of the mind are actually open and known to the Lord (Ps. 139:2; Heb. 4:13). The good news is God wants to sanctify—make holy—our minds.

In chapter 9 of *The Way of Holiness*, Steve DeNeff suggests that there are two disciplines we must develop in the sanctification of the mind: transformation and taking captive every thought.

Paul urged the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5 KJV). Briefly stated, the transformation of the mind is the development of Christlike thinking. How is this transformation possible?

It requires a thorough application of Scripture. In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus asked the Father to sanctify his followers “by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Exposure to the Word must involve more than simply listening to a sermon each Sunday. We must repent of our busy, often meaningless, schedules and find time for God’s Word. While Martha was busy with preparations associated with Jesus’ visit, her sister Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to what he said. Jesus cautioned Martha about being distracted by her busywork, but he commended Mary. “Mary has chosen what is better,” he said, “and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

In order for our minds to think like Christ, we must make adequate time for God’s Word and read it with an intense love (Ps. 119:68, 72). As we read the Bible, we will gain a clear view of God’s righteousness and our unrighteousness (Ps. 19:12). Also, we will learn what needs to change in our thinking and living.

Along with reading the Bible, we ought to memorize it. To meditate on Scripture is to ruminate on it. We should chew on it over and over until it becomes a part of our being. The psalmist said, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:11).

Taking every thought captive also plays an important role in sanctifying the mind (2 Cor. 10:5). Of course we need to avoid situations that war against Christlike thinking. For example, we must not view immoral movies and think we can simply feed on what’s good and spit out what’s bad.

In *The Way of Holiness*, DeNeff offers the following suggestions for capturing every thought and making them obedient to Christ. He suggests staying alert and being attentive to prayer, telling ourselves the truth, and confessing our thoughts to one another (James 5:16).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. What forces tend to waste a person’s mind?
2. Why do you agree or disagree that Christians often place too little emphasis on the role of the mind in sanctification?
3. Why does the mind need to be transformed?
4. How does conforming to the world affect the mind?
5. Some critics of Christianity say it is a mindless religion. How would you counter that criticism?
6. Why do you agree or disagree that believers are never too old to memorize Scripture?
7. Read Philippians 4:8. How would it help to transform a believer’s mind if he or she thought on the things listed in this verse?

Wrap-Up

Make two columns labeled “Helpful” and “Destructive.” Have the group suggest items that help us develop Christlike thinking and items that oppose this development. List the members’ suggestions in the appropriate columns.



week 10

When and How We Are Sanctified

To the Facilitator

Begin this week with a brief review of what your group has studied over the past nine weeks. Let volunteers share what they consider to be the most significant truths they have learned. After the brief review, tell the group this session explains when and how we are sanctified.

Focus on God's Word

The Bible always gives us the truth, and this is the case when it refers to our sanctification. We cannot miss God's desire for us to be sanctified when we read the following Scripture passages: John 10:10; 17:17–19; Romans 8:29; 12:1; Ephesians 1:4; 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; Hebrews 12:10.

Sanctification (complete devotion) is possible and desirable. As Steve DeNeff points out, “We want pure minds that meditate more than they covet or lust. We want hearts without carnal ambitions. We want bodies suited for the dwelling of Christ” (*The Way of Holiness*, pp. 179–180). But how do we acquire this holiness, this sanctification?

For starters, we need to recognize that God is at work in us (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). Also, we must seize opportunities the Spirit gives us to have our whole nature cleansed. DeNeff suggests studying the Bible seriously and daily, because God uses his Word to sanctify us (John 17:17). DeNeff also suggests that we pursue the knowledge of Christ—learn as much as we can about him. Assembling with other Christians is another suggestion (Heb. 10:25) and we ought to attend church regularly with inquisitive minds.

DeNeff's other suggestions are to schedule time with God, like Jesus spent time alone with his heavenly Father (Luke 5:16). This practice might cause us to put down the newspaper, give up some TV viewing, and shut down the computer, but doing so is well worth the effort. DeNeff recommends that we study and learn from church history, pray more and longer, partner in spiritual development with a trusted friend, care for others, and stay alert for the moment God is ready to sanctify us. Surrender to God, repentance, and faith are key elements in our sanctification.

Once sanctified, we are obligated to reform our lifestyles (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 3:16; 1 John 1:7). We dare not confuse the biblical order of repentance, faith, and reformation, otherwise, as DeNeff points out, “We will end up with shall conversions (which is faith before repentance) or legalism (which is reformation before faith)” (*The Way of Holiness*, pp. 193–194).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. If you were asked to give a synonym for sanctification, what would you give?
2. How might a believer make more time for God in his or her daily schedule?
3. Read Psalm 1:1–3. How frequently should a believer meditate on God’s Word?
4. According to Psalm 1, how does meditating on God’s Word affect one’s life?
5. How does God work in our lives (see Phil. 2:13)?
6. How would you distinguish true sanctification from false sanctification?
7. What happens if we put faith before repentance or reformation before faith?
8. Do you think churches underemphasize or overemphasize the importance of sanctification?

Defend your answer.

Wrap-Up

Have the group read or sing “Take Time to Be Holy,” and then have volunteers tell how they plan to reschedule their week to allow more time to be holy.



week 11

Habits of the Holy

To the Facilitator

Greet everyone warmly and thank the members for their participation throughout the past sessions. This final session helps us know what evidences affirm a sanctified life.

Focus on God's Word

It is one thing to profess sanctification, but it is quite another to possess it. If we are truly sanctified, our consciences will be clear, which will enable us to choose what is good and refuse what is evil. We will be prompted to do what is right and approve or disapprove our behavior. Proverbs 20:27 states, "A man's conscience is the Lord's searchlight exposing his hidden motives" (TLB). Addressing the Sanhedrin, the apostle Paul testified, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (Acts 23:1).

Paul's conscience was clear because he endeavored to keep it clear in the sight of God and man (Acts 24:16). Sanctified men and women pay attention to their consciences. If one's conscience has been transformed by the Word of God, it will alarm him or her of any disobedience to God but affirm him or her of obedience to God.

Sanctification produces a passion to become like Jesus. In *The Way of Holiness* (p. 201), Steve DeNeff poses key personal questions:

- Is my love for God occupying more and more of my think-time?
- Does it come up in my conversations more frequently?
- Is there anything or anyone in the world more important to me than Christ? Would I lose it all before giving up my love for God? Do other people know this?
- Do I inspire others?
- Are people attracted to holiness by the heat or energy of my passion for God?
- What have I sacrificed lately to further the kingdom of God or to tighten its grip on my life?

If we are looking to Jesus as sanctified people, we will seem abnormal in a secular culture and find ourselves ostracized by some others because our lifestyle contrasts sharply with theirs. Truly sanctified people lead lives that manifest holiness to the extent that others notice it and demonstrate power over sin.

Perfect love and genuine joy also characterize truly sanctified people. A good test of love is to substitute your name in 1 Corinthians 13 at the mention of love. A good test of genuine joy that is produced by the Spirit is to see how you respond to personal suffering. If you sing a doxology instead of a dirge, your joy is real. It is rooted in Jesus.

Paul's epistle of joy, Philippians, emerged from his house arrest in Rome. Instead of pitying his plight, he praised the Lord joyfully (1:12–18), and exhorted his readers to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4).

Focus on Life

Discuss the following with your group.

1. Why do you agree or disagree that conscience is a reliable moral guide?
2. How can a believer program his or her conscience to obey God's Word?
3. Why do you agree or disagree that it is a joy to be around a person who claims to be sanctified?
4. What changes, if any, have you observed in how churches teach sanctification?
5. Do you believe a sanctified person never sins? Defend your answer.
6. What evidence of genuine Christian love have you observed in the life of someone who claims to be sanctified?
7. In what heavy trial have you experienced joy? To what or whom do you attribute that joy?

Wrap-Up

Distribute note cards and pencils. Challenge each person to complete the following statement on the card: “As a result of the studies in *The Way of Holiness*, I will . . .” Instruct each person to keep the completed card in his or her Bible as a reminder to follow through on the decision.