

# ***“The Next Holy Thing”***

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***If you don't emerge from this crisis more holy, you missed a great opportunity.***

**1 Peter 1:13-2:3**

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## ***Who we really are – Pastor Paul***

Pastor Bob and I grew up in the era of evangelical prominence when all sins were the same. Before you are tempted to think 1 Peter 1:13-2:3 is simply a list of do's and don'ts, the theme in these verses is universal. It is also the theme of almost every Disney movie: Who you really are inside should determine how you act.

Looking at the first part of 1 Peter 1, Peter said “Now because of the gospel, you are a child of God—a son or daughter of God. He is your heavenly Father. You belong to him. That's who you are. You are no longer a child of this world. You are a child of God's holy court.”

If you apply this to Disney movies, it's the same thing.

- Cinderella's true identity shines regardless of the fact she is a maid in the evil step-mother's home.
- Ariel, in the Little Mermaid, gets into trouble because she denies who she really is and tries to be someone she is not.
- Aladdin shows he is a diamond in the rough. He has the heart of a prince even though he is a street urchin.
- Simba, in the Lion King, forgets who he really is and tries to be someone he is not. He has to return and take the identity of who he really is.

We applaud those Disney stories. But when it comes to applying it to our identity in Christ, we don't want that. "Can't we be like the rest of the world? I don't want to act like a child of God."

Who we are in Christ dictates how we live for Christ. It's not just a list of do's and don'ts. Our true identity in Christ must be evidenced by the way we live for him because of Christ.

Rather than going verse by verse, let's look at some themes in today's passage.

*First, our lives are a thank you letter to God because we understand the cost paid for us.*

Peter says "If you knew what your life cost the Lord, here's how you would live in gratitude and thanks." Verses 18, 19, 20, and 24 all reflect this saying "Living a holy life—a life that's different, a life that's set apart, a life that reflects God's character—is a reflection of the fact that you understand the cost that was paid for your life."

Verse 19 illustrates this. He paid for you "with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." Our own blood is not something we think of as incredibly important. I cut my hand with fishing line and blood was pouring down my arm. It was a nuisance. Someone else's blood is far more important. When my daughter had a head injury, was in shock, and in the ICU—her blood had a much different impact on me. We have not been just bought with *something* but we have been purchased with the precious life blood of Christ.

Once going to the foot of the cross is part of your daily life, it ought to have an impression on how you live. Your life becomes a perpetual thank you letter to God because you understand what it cost the Lord. A holy way of living flows out of you for the rest of your life.

*Second, because we are now close to God, live like you are actually close to God.*

In verses 14-15, Peter refers to us as his children. In verse 17, Peter says "you call on a Father." When I get an ice cream and my child wants a lick of my ice cream, I give it to them because they are my child. But if a random child comes over and wants a lick, I say "no" because that child is not close to me.

Peter says "Because you are close to God, live like you are close to God." In Chapter 2:2-3, Peter reminds us "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." You are that close to God in a caregiving relationship.

Verses 14, 17-18 demonstrate what the opposite of this means. The rest of the world is not close to God. They will deny God and curse God because they are not close to him. They feel like he is far away. That's not us. Live like you are close to God because you are. He is right there with you as a child is to their father or mother. That's the type of relationship that you have.

*Third, because we have the opportunity to really love make the most of it.*

You now have the ability, because of who you are in Christ, to have true loving relationships with your peers, family members, friends, and strangers. Make the most of it. Verse 22 says "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart."

Chapter 2:1 reminds us "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." In previous relationships, it was about what I could get out of a relationship for me. In reality, now we have the opportunity, because of Jesus, to love like Jesus. As Christians, we should have the same hope and goal—the best part of my life is where it borders and intersects with you. Make the most of it.

### ***Holy in everything – Pastor Bob***

Of all Peter's instructions in today's text, one seems central: "Be holy in everything you do" (15). If you don't emerge from the 2020 pandemic more holy than you were, you've missed a great spiritual opportunity. If God has been pushed out of your thoughts into the back recesses of your mind, you won't be holy in everything.

There's plenty of evidence that unholy thoughts, words, and actions abound. Alcohol consumption was up 55% in the third week in March ([Nielson](#)). Domestic abuse is up dramatically, according to a [New York Times article](#). We're hoarding everything from toilet paper to PPEs to any drug that might be a cure. The [political divide](#) deepens, and of course that leads to pride and condescension whether you're in the left, the right, or the middle. We are obsessed with news and statistics and predicting the future. Anxiety and fake news seem everywhere.

Today, though, I want to focus your attention not on "everywhere," but on you. Are you holier than you were eight weeks ago? Will you be more holy going forward?

This begs the question, of course: What is holiness? How would I know if I am more holy? This is one of many concepts in the Bible that has been misunderstood, misapplied, and used as a weapon of control or abuse.

Part of the problem is that there's a progress in the Bible from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and if you miss that, you misunderstand holiness.

In the Old Testament mostly *things* are holy. Holiness is most commonly connected to a place – a tent and later a glorious temple. Everything connected to that place is holy – the offerings, the priests, the furniture, even a shovel. The other dominant theme in the Old Testament is a holy day. The first reference to “holy” in the Bible is in the creation story, when God blessed the seventh day. The fourth of the Ten Commandments is “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

There’s a decided shift in the New Testament. The most common use of “Holy” in the New Testament is the third Person of the Trinity – the “Holy Spirit.” Right after that is us – God’s holy people, aka “the saints.” Places and things are hardly ever referred to as holy – unless it’s a reference back to the tabernacle or ahead to heaven.

What’s at the root of all of it is distinctiveness. Under the Old Covenant holy living was a separated life. Under the New Covenant holiness means living a distinctive life – in the world but not of it. No Jew would say what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9 – that he “would become all things to all men in order to win some.” Holiness in the Old Covenant means being different and separate. Holiness in the new covenant means being different and assimilated. In some ways that’s much, much harder.

You and I, as individuals, have been reclassified as “holy” not by what we’ve done but by what Jesus has done. We have been declared God’s “holy people,” and therefore we should act like it. In Peter’s words, “Be holy in everything you do.”

Christians sometimes turn holiness into a set of Moses-like rules. Go to church. Don’t commit adultery. Advocate for justice. All of those are important, and all are biblical. But if you measure your holiness by one or two standards, you think can ignore everything else: “Sleep around if you’re giving to the poor.” Or, “If you’re tithing you can get by with abusing your spouse.”

What *is* the standard of holiness? Peter borrows from the Old Testament. God says, “Be holy because I am holy.” You’re holy when you’re like God. We protest, “That’s an impossible standard!” True enough, but we emulate ideal people in other areas. A quarterback wants to be the next Tom Brady. A cook wants to be like Rachael Ray. I’d like to write and preach like Tim Keller. What entrepreneur isn’t tracking Jeff Bezos? You’ll never get there, but you learn something by imitating the best.

The quest for holiness is imitating God. And I want to ask again: Have you become more like God in these last few weeks? Are you looking more like Jesus every day? Are you giving the Holy Spirit permission to sanctify you – holy-ize you? And what might that look like?

This past week, Comer Shuford Wear, from a long line of Shufords who founded and still own and operate several major industries, published a [blog](#) in April titled “Do the Next Right Thing.” Comer borrowed the words from a song in Disney’s Frozen 2. Anna is in a dark cave, and loses contact with Elsa and Olaf. She is lost and her hope is

almost gone. But typical Anna finds her determination and starts to sing. “So I’ll walk through this night,” she sings, “Stumbling blindly toward the light, and do the next right thing.”

Peter’s paraphrase would be, “Do the Next Holy Thing.” If you have a hard time wrapping your head around being as holy as God is, then do the next holy thing. Let me show you how that concept is actually in today’s reading.

In Greek there are five key commands in this passage. Peter could have phrased them all in the “present” tense, which implies continuous action. Keep setting your hope on grace. Keep being holy in everything you do. Keep living in reverent fear. Keep loving each other sincerely. Keep craving spiritual milk.

Instead, he uses the Greek aorist imperative for all five commands. Each is like a staccato command. It’s a more pointed, direct action aimed at this moment.

1. *Right now*, believe you have all the grace you need. When Jesus Christ is revealed, Peter says, you will look back at this moment and say God’s grace was sufficient. The next holy thing is, right now, to believe that.
2. *In this moment*, ask what would look more like God. Peter and Moses both quote the Lord: “Be holy for I am holy.” This is his version of asking, “What would Jesus do?” Maybe you can’t figure that out for the rest of your life, but in this moment, you can ask what next thing would look like God.
3. Make *the next choice* in the fear of the Lord. Don’t be afraid of fear, when it applies to God. Yes, I know the word can mean reverent, awe, or respect. But it’s also fear in the same way that a Mom might instill in her children, “Just wait til your Dad comes home.” Except in cases of abuse, that’s a healthy fear. You are going to be accountable. Make your next choice in the fear of the Lord.
4. Love the person *in front of you*. Billions of people around the globe have had their lives disrupted by the coronavirus, but some of them live under your roof. So as you consider what might be the next holy thing, consider that it might be loving the people who are wearing you down because you’re together 24/7.
5. Get God’s Word *back in your frontal lobe*. Peter says when “malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander” (2:1) start to take over – or even have the potential to take control – what you need is the milk of God’s Word. When you’re tempted to join the world in its hatred, blame, and schism, taste again how good it is to feed from Scripture. That might be your next holy thing.

Sometimes the next holy thing is honest self-assessment. In this moment am I becoming more critical, more impatient, more envious? Have I been drinking more, using more, eating more, making more excuses for unhealthy sexual behavior? Am I taking advantage of social isolation to hide what I know is wrong? Have I returned to old habits of obsession and control? Have I become more attached to perishable things – even if I have less? Have I set aside spiritual disciplines? Have I decided God will give me a pass because I’m under abnormal pressure?

I’ll be personal with you. As this crisis unfolded, I felt – and still feel – the weight of leadership. Many of us feel responsibility not just for ourselves but for an entire business or organization – for people’s livelihoods and for not letting down those who went before us or who will come after. I’ve been reactive – and maybe I needed to be at first. Now as crisis turns to the new abnormal and normal seems nowhere in sight, it’s time to be proactive – to recover balance and focus. Remembering God hasn’t called me to be Messiah or Superman is my next holy thing.

What’s the next holy thing for you? Maybe it’s to listen to Chad Hall’s insightful [reflections on marriage](#) from last Wednesday night’s service. Maybe it’s to let me know you need to know how to reach AA or AlAnon. I have a current local contact. Maybe it’s to read a really good book to help you with upcoming decisions. Consider Emily Freeman’s *The Next Right Thing*. Maybe it’s to visit the “What Message Do You Need?” part of our [coronavirus web page](#) and see how the Lord might speak to you.

Rewind the tape to where you were headed spiritually eight weeks ago. Get back on the right treadmill. Trust that God wants to use this awful medical and economic crisis to do a deep spiritual work in you.

Don’t waste this great spiritual opportunity to become more like Jesus. Don’t wait until it’s over to strive for more holiness. Start now and do the next holy thing. Amen.