

(Needed-Men of God) 2. a Holy Man of God

by Zac Poonen

To be a holy man of God, we must strive to be transparent, disciplined, and devoted to spending time alone with God, and be willing to pay the price of holiness.

Scripture: Joshua 7:10-13, 2 Kings 4:8-9, Psalm 119:37, Isaiah 29:13, Jeremiah 15:19, Ezekiel 33:31, Ephesians 4:24, James 1:26, James 3:2, James 5:16

Topics: "Holiness", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the necessity of being holy men and women of God, as exemplified by Elisha, who was recognized as such by a discerning woman. He challenges the audience to reflect on the impression they leave on others, urging that mere eloquence or charisma is insufficient without genuine holiness. Poonen identifies guile, lack of discipline, and insufficient time spent with God as key barriers to achieving holiness. He asserts that true holiness is essential for effective ministry and revival, and that Christians must strive for a life that reflects God's holiness, regardless of personal ambition or recognition. Ultimately, he calls for a deep yearning for holiness that aligns with God's character, as this is crucial for impactful prayer and ministry.

Transcript

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually" (2 Kings 4:8, 9).

The woman who made this observation was "a rich and influential woman" (Amplified Bible). She was no gullible person, easily taken in by appearances. Elisha had visited her home frequently and she had watched him day after day as the heathen watch us. She finally came to the assured conclusion that Elisha was a holy man of God.

Brothers and sisters, when others watch us, if they are not able to come to this same conclusion, then whatever else we may say or do will be of no avail. I am not referring to the impression we make on people who know little about us, but on those who meet us frequently, those with whom we live, those who know us through and through.

What is the impression we make upon others? Do they consider us as merely smart and witty and eloquent or perhaps as having dynamic personalities? These qualities are essential and excellent when found in salesmen, but we are not called to be salesmen. We are called to be primarily holy men and women of God.

In our churches and Christian organisations, we have many preachers and soloists, and theologians and administrators. Thank God for every one of them. But do we have holy men of God? This is the important question. Only when we get holy men and women will we have any real revival.

I think it is true to say that we usually end up becoming the type of people we have really longed to be, in our hearts. If we had really yearned to be holy men and women of God-and remember, God sees the deepest longing in our hearts and answers that-we would assuredly have been such.

And so if we are not holy today, perhaps the reason is that our real ambitions have been otherwise. Maybe we are satisfied with being just smart and dynamic and with having administrative acumen. It is easy to say we desire holiness above everything else, because that is the right thing to say. But like God's people in the days of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the deepest desire of our hearts and the profession of our lips may be poles apart (Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31).

We may preach one blessing or we may preach two. But no theory of sanctification and no testimony of past experiences can ever be a substitute for a genuinely holy life-a life that possesses "the holiness which is no illusion" (Ephesians 4:24 - JBP).

We know that in India, some of our non-Christian friends have a very high moral standard. If they see a lower standard of holiness in us than what their religion teaches them, how are they ever going to be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ. How sad yet true it is that some devout non-Christians, in spite of all their errors and mistaken ideas, often manifest a greater degree of integrity and uprightness than many Christians do. We should be ashamed of this fact and fall on our faces before God and beg for His mercy.

We need genuinely holy men and women in our churches, and especially among our Christian leaders. Apart from them, all our efforts to reach our country for Christ will be in vain.

We Christians profess to be indwelt by the Spirit of God. But let us not forget that He Who indwells us is called the Holy Spirit and that His primary function is not to give us gifts but to make us holy.

When Isaiah saw a vision of God, he heard the seraphim around the throne crying out, not "Almighty, Almighty, Almighty," nor "Merciful, Merciful, Merciful," but "Holy, Holy, Holy." Anyone who has seen such a sight will realise that it is no light thing to be a servant of such a God. Holiness is an imperative necessity in the life of one who is called to represent the High and Lofty One Whose Name is Holy.

The fact that our God is an infinitely holy God should be the greatest incentive for holiness in our lives. "Be ye holy, for I am Holy," says the Lord. If we strive for holiness merely because we want God to use us, our motive is selfish. We should desire to be holy because our God is Holy, quite regardless of whether He uses us or not.

As Elisha moved around, this was the impression he made upon all with whom he came into contact-that he was a holy man of God. People might have forgotten his messages and even the three points of his sermons, but they could not forget the impact of his life. What a challenge this should be to us! How we should covet that, more than being just eloquent in our sermons, wonderful in our exposition of the

Scriptures and able in our administration of affairs, we might above all be holy men of God. People cannot easily erase from their memories the impression made upon them by such men.

As I have moved around this land of ours, I have met many Christian leaders and missionaries with wonderful gifts and abilities. I have met exhibitionists and extroverts. But I have met very few to whom I could look up as holy men of God. I hope I am wrong in my assessment but I have a fear I may be right.

The fact that God uses a man in His service is no indication that the man is holy or that his life is well-pleasing to God. God used an ass once to deliver His message, He used the ass's master, Balaam too, to prophesy, even though the man himself was corrupt. If God uses a man to minister His Word, it is often because of His mercy and because He loves the people to whom the man ministers, not necessarily because He is happy with the man's life.

No, we do not have to be holy men in order to minister the Word impressively. But we do have to be holy men if we are to be a part of that remnant that carries on God's battles behind the scenes and cooperates with Him in building that which cannot be shaken or burnt for all eternity.

I've asked myself why we have so few holy men and women in our churches and I've come across at least three reasons for this. There may be more.

Guile

The first reason I'm sure is the wide prevalence of guile. The first step to practical holiness is always a freedom from all guile and hypocrisy.

No man can be a holy man of God if he does not strive with all his heart to remove guile from his life completely. The remnant pictured in Revelation 14:1-5, are described as having no guile whatsoever. Very often, there is more guile in us than we think. There is not one of us who will not have to confess, if we are honest, that we often seek to give a better impression of ourselves to others than is really the case. We need to get rid of this habit. We need to battle against it constantly and put it to death, if we are to be really holy. We should strive to be transparent and to be known as we actually are. I know this is not easy. It is a life-long battle to be always free from all guile. But this is the first step, and there will never be any revival anywhere without this. We are long fooling ourselves if we think that God is going to answer our prayers for revival if we don't make a determined effort to get rid of guile from our lives.

It is guile that hinders real Christian fellowship too. All too often, hidden grudges and an unforgiving spirit are harboured in the hearts of Christian leaders and missionaries. Beneath an outwardly pleasant facade of spirituality are these slimy evils of the bottomless pit. These must be exposed and forsaken if we are to be holy men of God.

Guile and hypocrisy were the sins that Jesus condemned more than any other. "Beware," He told His disciples, "of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." When this sin appeared in the early church, God dealt with it drastically. He immediately slew the couple involved, lest the whole lump be leavened by this little leaven (Acts 5).

I have often read and meditated on Jesus' testimony about Nathaniel, "Behold a man in whom there is no guile;" and I have wondered whether there is any greater commendation we could covet than that. We need to ask ourselves whether God can say the same about us. Alas so often He cannot-for He sees in us the sins that we have carefully tucked away from the eyes of our fellow-men.

Blessed indeed is the man in whom there is no guile.

Lack of Discipline

A second reason for the lack of holiness in our day is that we do not rigidly discipline ourselves. The New Testament places great emphasis on the discipline of our bodily members-especially of the ear, the eye and the tongue. In Romans 8:13, Paul says that we cannot enjoy spiritual life if we do not mortify the deeds of the body through the power of the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, he tells us how severely he disciplined his own body. No matter what experience of sanctification we may have had, we still need to discipline our bodily members, as Paul did, till the end of our lives, if we are to be holy.

We must be disciplined about the kind of conversation we give our ears to. We cannot afford to spend our time listening to gossip and slander and then expect our ears to be attuned to hear God's Voice.

Our eyes need to be disciplined in what they are permitted to look at and read-especially in these days. More than one missionary and servant of God has fallen into immorality because he did not habitually control his eyes. How many more are perpetually falling in their thought-life, because of indiscipline in this area.

"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," should be our constant prayer (Psalms 119:37).

Our tongues too need to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps there is no greater spreader of spiritual death in the Christian Church than the human tongue. When Isaiah saw God's Holiness, he was convicted chiefly of the way he had been using his tongue. Apparently he had not realised this until he saw himself in God's light.

Jeremiah was told by the Lord that he could be God's mouthpiece only if he was careful about the way he used his tongue-if he separated the valueless from the precious in his conversation (Jeremiah 15:19).

These prophets could not afford to be careless about the way they used their tongues, or they would have forfeited the privilege of being God's spokesmen. They could not indulge in loose conversation, idle chatter, gossip, slander and criticism and get away with it. They would have lost their calling thereby. This could be one reason why we have hardly any prophets in our day.

Watchman Nee has said in "The Normal Christian Worker,"

"If a Christian worker talks inadvisably about all sorts of thing, how can he expect to be used of the Lord in the utterance of His Word? If God has ever put His Word on our lips, then a solemn obligation is upon us to guard these lips for His service alone. We cannot offer a member of our bodies for His use one day and the next day take it back for use at our own discretion. Whatever is once presented to Him is eternally His."

As in the physiology of the body, a doctor can often assess our state of health by looking at our tongues, so too in the spiritual realm, James tells us that the way a man uses his tongue is a test of his spirituality (James 1:26). He makes bold to say that if a man can control his tongue he is a perfect man (James 3:2).

No Time for God

A third reason for the general lack of holiness in our day is the fact that we do not spend enough time alone with God. No man can be holy unless he determines that the most important thing in his life is to

spend time in the Most Holy Place with God. This is our highest priority.

Moses' face shone, but it was only after he had spent forty days alone on the mount with God. He saw a holy man of God because he knew his God face to face. So with Elisha. He could refer to God as, "Jehovah before Whom I stand" (2 Kings 3:14; 5:16). He knew what it was to meet God often face to face and it was this that made him holy.

In our day, things move around us at such a tremendous pace that we can be so easily caught in the hustle and bustle of activity and end up with having no time to spend alone with God. It is thus that the Devil saps us of our spiritual vitality. He makes us put such a premium on activity and on committee-meetings that the Most Holy Place is neglected.

It has always been a challenge to me to read of the times when Jesus got away from men to be alone with His Father. Once at the end of a busy day of preaching and ministering to the physical needs of thousands, He went off by Himself into a mountain to have a quiet time with His Father (Matthew 14:23). On another occasion after He had worked late into the previous night healing the sick, He arose early and went into a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). Such is the example given us by the Son of God Who was busier than any of us could possibly be. Who among us would dare say in the light of this that we can do without long hours of waiting before God?

Because Elisha knew what it was to stand before his God frequently, he also knew how to rebuke sin fearlessly. He told the King of Israel, without fear of favour, exactly what God thought of him. He confronted even his own co-worker Gehazi, with his sin, when the latter fell a prey to covetousness. And Elisha did this without trying to be tactful or diplomatic and without beating around the bush.

There is a place for diplomacy and tact, no doubt, but there are also times when a faithful and fearless rebuking of sin is what is needed. Why is it that there are so few among us who speak out against the sin and worldliness and compromise in Christian circles that is so widespread in our day? I fear the reason is that we seek the praise of men and hence do not desire to offend anybody. Such a carnal desire in turn, stems invariably from the fact that we spend too little time in the presence of God, learning His fear.

It is essential if we are to be prophets of God that we speak out against all compromise that lowers the standards that God has laid down in His Word, and that we stand against all that God Himself is against. We shall have to take this stand not only as individuals but also as a body of believers. If we as a body of evangelicals do not speak to the Church in India with a prophetic voice in this day, we shall be failing in our responsibility before God.

Speaking out with a prophetic voice against all that comes short of God's highest purpose for His Church, may perhaps reduce our numbers, but God has always been more interested in quality than in quantity. We don't have to make the narrow way any broader than God Himself has made it.

The prophets of old were always misunderstood and rejected by the people of their day, and the same fate awaits any who would be prophets today. But we can take courage from the wise words of A.B. Simpson, that great man of God, who founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance. He said,

"The true measure of a man's worth is not always the number of his friends but sometimes the number of his foes. Every man who lives in advance of his age is sure to be misunderstood and often persecuted. Therefore, we must expect often to be unpopular, often to stand alone, even to be maligned, perhaps to

be bitterly and falsely assailed and driven `without the camp' even of the religious world."

God is looking today not merely for preachers, but for prophets who will speak His Word faithfully, as did the prophets of old-men of whom it can be said like it was said of Elisha, "The word of the Lord is with him." (2 Kings 3:12).

But there is no short-cut to such a ministry. Prophets are not made in a matter of moments like instant-coffee. They are not produced by mere seminary training either. We must know what it is to wait long hours in God's presence seeing His glory, hearing His voice and being transformed into His likeness.

Yes, we must be holy first before we can be prophets.

Praying for Revival

Brothers and sisters, before we continue praying for revival, we need to ask ourselves first whether we are willing to pay the price involved in being holy men and women of God.

Often when we pray I fear that God has to tell us to stop praying. Yes, there are times when God does not want His children to pray. He told Joshua once, "Don't pray Joshua. You're wasting your time." And until Joshua got up and exposed Achan's sin publicly and set things right in the camp of Israel, God refused to listen to his prayers (Joshua 7:10-13).

And so we need to ask ourselves when we come to the Throne of grace, whether God is listening. Perhaps He isn't. We still haven't settled matters with that brother with whom fellowship has been broken. We continue to show partiality to the rich and the influential in our congregations and refuse to confront them with their sins. We still haven't humbled ourselves and confessed the shame and pretence that there is in our lives. Our tongues are still uncontrolled. We are seldom found in the Most Holy Place. Our hearts have not yet come to the point of yearning to be holy men and women of God at any cost. Of what value are our prayers then? For, after all, it is only the fervent prayer that comes from a holy man that avails much before God (James 5:16).

May the Lord search our hearts.

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