

HOLINESS

FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE

SERMON NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

Sooner or later most Christians discover there is sin they can't beat and power they don't have. Through history this discovery has brought virtually all denominations and religious movements to teaching there is a "deeper life" available by the power of the Holy Spirit. This life has variously been called: the higher life, an upper room experience, being baptized with the Holy Ghost, Pentecostal power, living in the Spirit, a second work of grace, the sanctified life, entire sanctification, being filled with the Spirit, and the fully devoted life.

While these various terms admittedly have different nuances for theologians to discuss, the most important issue in preaching is to find a term or phrase that invites "ordinary Christians" into this deeper walk of devotion to Christ. While a printed book like *Holiness for Ordinary People* will tend to use the technical terms of *holiness* and *entire sanctification*, most preachers feel they have the freedom to use whatever term rings clearest for their people. Thus, most preachers, when preaching this four-week series, will substitute the term or phrase they have chosen. The title of this campaign is, "Fully Devoted," but it can just as easily be "The Spirit-Filled Life" or "Holiness for Ordinary People."

Holiness for Ordinary People includes eight chapters that could be considered sermon starters themselves; the following four sermon starters are completely new and written more for today's church attendee who has a limited understanding of deeper life teachings. The positive side of that is preachers do not have to spend much time today explaining what holiness is not. For instance, the chapter in *Holiness for Ordinary People* called "Sidetracks from Holiness," which explains such excesses as legalism, is hardly needed today.

The four sermons are in a logical order, but if you are a preacher who likes to move along for a series of Sundays then have an altar call at the end, you will want to rearrange the sermons, or add other sermons of your own.



1

WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

1 Thessalonians 5:2–24

INTRODUCTION

As Paul closed 1 Thessalonians, he began piling up instructions on living a holy life—the sort of lifestyle expected of a Christian. He was explicit in his laundry list:

- They should respect religious workers among them—their pastors and leaders.
- Keep at peace with each other in the church.
- Practice admonishing idle Christians.
- Take up the ministry of encouraging the fainthearted.
- Find the weak and give them a hand.
- Be patient with everyone.
- Constantly be rejoicing.
- Constantly be praying.
- Give thanks no matter how bad it is—or how good.
- Be especially careful so as to not “quench the Spirit” or cause the Spirit to withdraw.
- Don’t easily dismiss prophecies or easily accept them without testing.
- Avoid every kind of evil.

What a shopping list for holy living! And that’s just this one passage. What if we added all the other places in the New Testament where Jesus or Paul described the Christian life like this. *Every* kind? How can an ordinary Christian live this way? It sounds impossible! Yet the answer lies in verses 23–24.

TRANSITION

Paul didn't leave his readers without a solution to the problem of what seems to be impossibly high standards. After describing what the holy life looks like, Paul told us how ordinary Christians like us can live in holiness in these next two verses.

1. Sanctification is how God makes us holy.

The apostle Paul said we can live holy lives by sanctification. *Sanctification* means “set apart” and “made holy.” In sanctification, ordinary things became hallowed (the temple and altar, timbers and stones, places and days, the priesthood and apostles).

God's sanctification changes things. Ordinary stones and people were changed so that they became something new—the ordinary became sacred, hallowed, and holy.

In this passage, Paul was calling for the sanctification of people, transformation of ordinary Christians into a holy people, so they can live like he just described (Paul was not talking to unbelievers, but Christians in Thessalonica).

Sanctification is the invisible work of God transforming ordinary people into the sort of persons who live extraordinary lives by God's power—even so far as to live abstaining from *every* form of evil.

2. Sanctification can be complete.

Paul had big expectations of God's sanctifying work. When God sanctifies a person “through and through,” he sanctifies that person completely, wholly, entirely. But that does not mean they have no room for growth.

Just in case we missed how complete and thorough this sanctification can be, Paul explained the outcomes: our spirit, soul, and body will be preserved blameless. There isn't much left if your entire spirit, soul, and body have been sanctified.

No matter what you believe about sanctification, know this: God intends to completely and fully (entirely) sanctify you, through and through.

3. He does it; we don't.

God does it, not us.

In the modern world, we are a “do it” people, especially in North America. We are a practical people who tend to take every instruction for holy living as something we can do by trying harder or doing better and better until some day we finally reach our goal. But that is not what this verse says. It does not say, “Try harder to live this way until you finally achieve your goal.” Instead Paul simply said, “May the God of peace sanctify you.”

We can change ourselves a bit, sometime even a lot, but nobody on earth can sanctify themselves through and through. Only God can do this.

This sermon series is about trusting. Today's Scripture calls you to trust God to sanctify you through and through—completely, wholly, entirely. God might sanctify you slowly and gradually over many years, or do it in spurts and fits with interspersed rest stops. He might do it instantly in

a flash of an eye, or in a few weeks and you will be a completely different kind of Christian in only a short time. However God does it, he will do it. God is in the business of transforming ordinary Christians into extraordinary saints.

This sermon series is to assure you that making you holy is God's work, not yours, and he will do it!

CENTRAL POINT

God is in the sanctifying business—making men and women holy. Slow or fast, he will get his work done one way or another. Be encouraged! You are going to be a holy person! Not just theoretically holy, but actually holy. God is not just going to pretend you're holy; he is going to make you holy! Through and through! This is your future, this is your end. Complete sanctification is your destiny (Rom. 8:29).

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Have you seen God at work already in your life, God already changing and sanctifying you since you were saved?

Have these changes God's already made been good for you? Don't you think God wants to release even more power in your life? God is going to sanctify you fully! He will do it fast or slow, sooner or later, but "He will do it!"

Though sanctification is God's work alone, we still have a role. God will not sanctify us against our will, no more than he saves people against their will. Is it your desire to be completely sanctified?

What role do we have? Our job is to seek, wait, hunger, thirst for righteousness, ask, and knock until God does his work of sanctifying us through and through.

Are you hungering for holiness or being casual about it? The biggest thing holding God's sanctifying work back is us.

God seldom sanctifies what has not been surrendered. Is there anything you have you not surrendered to Christ? Anything you are holding back? Some secret sin you feel guilty about but still delight in it? God will sanctify whatever we fully surrender to him. Is there something you have not fully surrendered to Christ?

What we yield to God, he will cleanse, empower, and sanctify. If we yield things to him one by one, he will sanctify them one by one. What is it you need to yield to Jesus today? Are you are ready to yield everything today? Are you ready to say, "I surrender all" to Jesus? If we yield everything to him, he will sanctify everything we yield. Will you yield to him and wait until he sanctifies you wholly? If you must keep seeking for his work of sanctification for months or for years, will you be patient and diligent? Are you that serious about being sanctified?

We can't become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ by trying harder. We should instead rely on the One who can actually make us holy—God himself.

What are you willing to surrender to God and ask him to sanctify?



2

FILLED WITH LOVE

Matthew 22:35–39

INTRODUCTION

Did you ever face a coach, teacher, or parent who had standards so impossibly high that you simply could not reach them? No matter how hard you tried, it wasn't good enough? Tell a story from your own life or another's that helps the audience feel the frustration of trying and failing because someone's standards were out of reach.

At first glance, today's Scripture looks like God is a demanding ogre-like father, insisting we jump higher than we could ever jump.

An expert in the law asked Jesus a simple question: Which is the Greatest Commandment? Jesus gave two simple answers: the greatest is loving God with everything you have, and the second greatest is loving others as much as you love and care for yourself. What? Merely love God completely and love others fully? What sort of standards are these? Jesus sounds like the impossible-to-please coach or teacher. Or worse, a parent who demands their ten-year-old child leap over a forty-foot high jump. Who loves God with all their heart, soul, and mind? Who loves every other person on earth as fully as they love and care for themselves? What kind of a demanding parent is God anyway? How could he expect of us what we cannot do?

TRANSITION

What can these two commandments mean? How can we explain this difficult tension—God seemingly demanding we live a life that seems impossible—fully loving God and others? That sort of life would be perfect—it would be perfect love to love God and others so completely. Who can live that way? So what could these two Great Commandments mean?

1. An ideal to admire.

Some might say the commandment to completely love God and others is just an ideal to admire, not a real commandment to keep. They explain away these two commandments by saying God doesn't actually expect us to love him completely, or even love our neighbors; he merely wants us to admire that sort of life. If we took these words of Jesus this way, we could get away with loving God with some of our heart and loving some of our neighbors, but let ourselves off the hook by saying we still admire the idea of completely loving God and others.

The trouble with treating these as only ideals to admire is that they are pretty clear—Jesus commanded us to love God completely and love our neighbor as ourselves. While we admire this kind of life, especially the way Jesus lived it, it is still unsatisfying to let ourselves off the hook by saying it is only an ideal to admire. Most of us wouldn't be satisfied saying that the rest of God's commandments (like not killing or not committing adultery) were merely ideals to admire. They are actual commandments to obey. So there must be a better explanation than an ideal to admire for these tall orders.

2. A standard to strive for.

We might try to explain these high standards as something we should strive for even though we know we'll never get there. These commandments encourage us to "try harder" to love God completely and "try harder" to love other people, even though you never actually fully obey these commandments. Some even might say that someday, after many years of hard striving, you might actually reach a level of loving God and others like Jesus commanded.

The trouble with treating these two great commandments as standards to strive for is that none of us can ever strive our way into holiness. We know that we can change by trying harder, but we can never become perfect by striving. God has built into humans a hunger for holiness—even unbelievers have high standards (especially for Christians). However, we cannot work our way to holiness. Even if we could, when we got there it would be a Tower of Babel, something we constructed ourselves, that would collapse in self-righteousness. Treating these two commandments as a standard to strive for isn't the answer either. Though we all agree we should try harder to be loving, we also know you can't try yourself into love. Love comes some other way to people.

3. A life to be received.

There is a third explanation for these commandments—that a human can actually love God and others completely. God never demands what he will not enable. Not that we can live up to this lifestyle by trying on human effort. But we can be changed by receiving this love from God. Humans can't try their way into loving God or others. But we can receive God's perfect love by the Holy Spirit. God is love (1 John 4:8) and the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). When we become full of God's Spirit, we are full of love. God the Father, Son, and Spirit love each other supremely. When the Spirit fills us, the Spirit loves the Father and Son completely, and we do too. God the Spirit loves all other humans too. When we are filled with the Spirit, the Spirit loves our neighbors like he loves us. This is the best way we can come to obey the first and second Greatest

Commandments—be filled with God’s Spirit. We already have God’s Spirit if we have been saved, but being filled with God’s Spirit can make us become more like God, more loving. It can enable a life of love, loving God and others like God loves.

CENTRAL POINT

We humans can actually obey the two Greatest Commandments: fully and completely loving God and others. Not just by trying harder, but by being filled with God’s Spirit. Once filled with the Spirit, God will do all the loving through us.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Have you been discouraged with your weak love for God? Do you wish you could really love someone in your life that you can’t? Are you tired of trying to love on your own power? Do you hunger to love like God? Do you hunger to be filled with the love of God?

Do you hunger to be filled with the Spirit of God? Are you ready today to begin seeking to be filled with the Spirit? How long would you seek? How long would you wait? How long have you been seeking already?

Would you begin today a period of pondering your spiritual state? Will you begin seeking this filling until you receive it? Are you ready to receive the filling of the Holy Spirit today?



3

GETTING DRUNK WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 2:4, 14–15; Ephesians 5:18

INTRODUCTION

This sermon is about drunkenness, not getting drunk on alcohol, but a good kind of inebriation—being filled with the Holy Spirit. When the apostolic leaders gathered on Pentecost, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, but some in the audience thought they were drunk (Acts 2). At a later time, when the apostle Paul cautioned the Ephesian Christians to avoid getting drunk on alcohol, he told them to instead “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Perhaps the connection between being drunk on alcohol and being filled with the Holy Spirit can help us understand some important things.

First, let’s take a quick survey of the Bible and being filled with the Spirit.

Old Testament

Bezalel, a craftsmen building the temple was filled with the Spirit of God (Ex. 31:3).

Saul, in his early days was promised, “The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you” (1 Sam. 10:6–7). And when he met the company of prophets coming from Gibeah, “the Spirit of God came upon [Saul] in power, and he joined in their prophesying” (1 Sam. 10:10).

New Testament

On Pentecost the apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were thought to be drunk but Peter told the crowd, “These men are not drunk. . . . It’s only nine in the morning!” (Acts 2:15).

We must ask if being filled with the Spirit was a one-time experience reserved only for those in the upper room, or can a Christian be filled with the Spirit today? This morning? We believe that a

person can be filled with the Spirit today just like they were in the first century. This is a spiritual experience available to all Christians at all times, and we think there is something to learn about being filled with the Spirit from the example of drunkenness.

Today's sermon does not have illustrations but *is* an illustration. When we preach an illustration, it is like the parables: there are truths to discover but we can't authoritatively teach doctrine from the illustration. So, this sermon is a parable on alcohol and the Spirit's filling.

TRANSITION

What can we learn about being "filled with the Holy Spirit" from drinking alcohol? Consider these possibilities.

1. Some never touch a drop.

Some people have never taken a sip of alcohol and never plan to. Same with being filled with the Spirit. Some have been so inoculated against anything Spirit-related (by denominational prejudices, the example of others, or their past) that they never even consider being Spirit-filled. They made up their minds years ago that they want none of the Holy Spirit stuff—not a drop. They close their ears to today's sermon; their souls are hardened soil to this seed.

2. Some can't stand the taste.

Some people took a sip of alcohol years ago, didn't like it, and never plan to sip it again. Same with being filled with the Spirit. Some hung around the Spirit-filled life just long enough to decide they don't want to be that serious about their Christianity. They are content living a nominal Christian life, and they desire nothing more than to dwell just inside the door.

3. Some are social drinkers.

Some people take a drink or two when they are around others. They are social drinkers. Same with being filled with the Spirit. Some Christians dabble around with Spirit-filled living only when they hang around other church people who talk about the Spirit-filled life. Once they leave the church or go to their jobs, they never even think about it. They are social drinkers of the Spirit; they drink at church but nowhere else.

4. Drunkenness starts with a sip.

While you can't get drunk from a sip, all drunkenness starts with a sip. Same with being filled with the Spirit. If you start drinking in the Holy Spirit, even with little sips, you are likely to wind up completely filled with the Holy Spirit. Every person who starts seeking the Spirit's filling does not wind up filled with the Spirit, but everyone who is filled with the Spirit started out opening themselves up to him.

5. It's hard to know when you're drunk.

There is a line a person can cross from being buzzed into outright drunkenness, but it's hard to know when you have crossed it. Generally speaking, others can tell if someone is drunk before that person can. Same with being filled with the Spirit. Other people can often see the fruit of godliness faster than you can. The church has many people who are living Spirit-filled lives but barely recognize it or might not even claim it. Others know it though.

6. When you are drunk you are “under the influence.”

When alcohol fully takes over, it becomes the boss. The drunkard is still there, participating in life, but when alcohol takes over, the person is now “under the influence” of alcohol. Same with being filled with the Spirit. When God fills a Christian completely with his Spirit, the individual is still participating in life but is now under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Once the Spirit fills us, we start acting like Jesus because we are under the influence of the Spirit.

7. To some alcohol becomes the driving force of life.

A person can become so obsessed with alcohol that it becomes the driving force of life. Getting the next drink is more important than anything else . . . than *everything* else. Their thirst for alcohol is unquenchable. Same with being filled with the Spirit. A Spirit-filled believer can become so passionate about loving God that they hunger, thirst, and seek until they find and are filled with God. They wake up with God on their mind and go to bed with God as their last thought. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we love, seek, magnify, serve, and worship what the Spirit himself does. So of course we act this way—like Christ would act.

CENTRAL POINT

What we want to explore today is what we can possibly learn from drunkenness that might apply to being filled with the Spirit.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Are you just taking a sip every once in a while of the Spirit? Are you just a social drinker of the Spirit's power? Are you a heavy drinker? Are you “under the influence” of the Spirit?

How much have you surrendered yourself to the Spirit? How much has he filled you? Are you just dabbling around with Christ or do you want to be totally filled with the Spirit?

God will fill the vessels we open up to him. Are you ready to be filled with the Spirit of God?



4

IF YOU SIMPLY DON'T BELIEVE IT

1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–24

INTRODUCTION

We have been preaching a series of sermons about holiness—living a Christlike life and sanctification, the work God does in changing ordinary people into holy people when he fills them with the Holy Spirit.

Some of you have been delighted to hear these messages because they described exactly what has already happened in your life. Others of you have generally missed the series altogether. Maybe you missed every week until today. Or you came to every sermon and the whole thing completely escaped you.

Today, I am speaking to a third group—those who were here and understood but you don't believe it, at least not yet. You don't believe in such a thing as entire sanctification (holiness, a deeper life, or being filled with the Spirit). You are an honest doubter. You aren't mad; you're just not convinced. You'd even like it to be true, but you're just not sure it is. What should a Christian who is an honest doubter do in the face of this series of sermons on sanctification and holiness?

It is OK to doubt the truth of a preacher's sermon. In fact, both of today's Scriptures urge Christians to be wary of believing everything they hear. The apostle John told his readers, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). Listeners have a responsibility in preaching. It is the listeners who affirm a sermon's truth. This is why we have Bible studies, discipleship classes, and Sunday school—to equip laity in the Word so they can carry on the task of affirming sermons. We don't just affirm the truths we like and reject those we dislike. It is based on deeper thought than that. Testing a sermon's truth is your job. You should avoid being gullible listeners, believing everything you read on the Internet or that is preached in church.

Consider our second Scripture. Just a few verses away from the classic passage on entire sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 5, there is that little command to “not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything” (1 Thess. 5:20–21). This is your job as a listener. Sure, you are to be careful not to dismiss or blow off preaching, but treat sermons seriously. You should treat them so seriously that you test them all. So, if you are wondering if this idea of entire sanctification is really possible, you are merely doing your job as a Christian listener—testing the sermon.

TRANSITION

This sermon will tell you how to test things like the Bible calls us to do. If you are not convinced that God can transform an ordinary person into a holy person, here is what you should do to test the truth of this idea, or any idea.

Test 1: Is this idea found in the Bible?

God expects listeners to know if a sermon idea is biblical or not. He wants you to be like the Berean Jews who heard Paul’s strange teaching but did not immediately reject it. Instead, “They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). So, if you’re doubting that a person can be filled with the Spirit, or sanctified completely, see what the Bible says about this. Does the Bible call Christians to love God and others completely? Does the Bible promise victory over sin? Does the Bible talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit? Does the Bible tell any stories where people were filled with the Spirit? Does the Bible expect people to be constantly sinning or does it instead promise deliverance from this defeated life? What does the Bible say? Nobody is expecting you to be so gullible that you’d believe everything a preacher says. Go ahead and test it with your Bible.

Test 2: Have Christians thought this for a long time or is it new?

The second question tests how universal this idea is among Christians past and present. Generally speaking, “If it’s new, it’s not true; if it’s true, it’s not new.” If you are hearing something for the first time in Christian history, you should see red flags all over the place. If your preacher has solved a riddle that has eluded scholars and saints for two thousand years, be extra wary! Either the preacher thinks he or she has invented a truth that was already written long ago, or he or she has invented a falsehood. Sure, there is room for *developing* areas in Christian thought, but not for new basic ones. It is good to be suspicious of new teachings. Yes, it is conceivable that God might do a new thing, but Christians should be automatically wary if an idea is new—that is how cults begin. So go ahead and test this idea of holiness through history and with other denominations. Search out the Spirit-filled life through the ages. Is this an old idea or a new one? Have there always been Christians who sought to live a fully devoted life, a sanctified life, a holy life? Did this idea start “recently,” in the 1700s with John Wesley, or is it long-term? Or does it trace all the way back through the Reformation, the Catholic Church, and Eastern Orthodoxy, or is it a recent idea? This second test makes sure the idea has some history and isn’t just a new idea.

This may seem like too much work to some of you. You'd rather decide truth based on preference than testing. Or maybe you are thinking, "That's why we hire a preacher—so we don't have to test truth." Well, it is true—we do expect our preachers (and our denominations) to do this, but if you are not going to believe everything a preacher says, this is the honest Christian's alternative.

Test 3: Does it make sense that this would be true?

This question asks us to use our heads, our common sense. Christians don't have to throw away their minds when they get saved. In fact, some of the verses discussed in this series called for God to sanctify our minds! This third test runs an idea through the lie detector of a sanctified mind or our reason. Go ahead and do it. Ask yourself logical questions to test the truth of holiness, sanctification, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. For instance, would God command us to love him with all our hearts if it were not possible to actually do so? What sort of God would demand what was impossible? Is this the kind of God the rest of the Bible portrays? What are the alternative explanations for sanctification, holiness, and being filled with the Spirit where they appear in the Bible? Does God transform Christians? How much? How fast? Does it make sense that God would change his children to become Christlike? Is it reasonable that God would provide the power to live like he keeps calling us to live? The third question helps us see if the idea makes sense to our minds.

Test 4: Is there anyone anywhere who lives like this?

People say they've experienced all kinds of crazy things, so human experience can never be the only test, or even the first test. If some preacher is telling you that you can experience X and you are unable to find a single person from the past or present who has experienced it, it is likely wrong. Of course we have to be careful not to only ask the human experience question only of ourselves: "Have I experienced this?" Just because we have not experienced something, does not make it false. In fact, we never have experienced what we are testing, that's why we're testing it! For instance, an unsaved person would never believe being saved is possible if they only looked at their own life. Same with being filled with the Spirit. If you have not personally experienced this, it is not proof it does not exist. Has anyone experienced it? Start gathering facts: Who else has experienced this? How many? How do they describe it? While human experience can't verify truth for sure, it can be a strong corroborating witness to truth that is already affirmed by the Bible, long teaching in the church, and plain good sense.

These four tests—scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—can help you decide if a teaching is true. Go ahead and test this teaching on holiness and sanctification so you can decide for yourself. Dig into your Bible and study. Read some suggested books. Check to see if this is a longstanding teaching of the church. Think about it, talk with others, and see if it makes sense. See if you can find anyone who can verify it with personal experience and testimony. Maybe then you will decide if it is true and begin seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

So, what should you do if you do all this testing above and then decide being filled with the Spirit today can't happen—complete sanctification is *not* true?

If you decide a completely devoted life of holiness is impossible, I still have some advice for you. You don't need to leave this church because you disagree with this teaching. We all want you to stay around here even if you reject the teaching we consider important. Here are four things to consider.

1. Stay open.

Who knows, sometimes people change their minds later. Don't slam the door forever. Sometimes we reject an idea because we are not yet ready for it. Maybe you will see this completely differently in a few years or a decade, so stay open. At least say, "At this time, I doubt it." That leaves the door open for the future. Sometimes people reach a new stage of life when a teaching they formerly rejected rescues them! So, stay open.

2. Is there one thing you would surrender?

If you reject the idea of a single event when a Christian consecrates their all—their future, hopes, reputation, family, words, thoughts, deeds, property, and everything else, you probably still believe you should surrender things one-by-one gradually. Can you think of *one* thing God is nudging you to surrender? Surrender that. What is that one thing you feel you need to sacrifice to Christ now? Sacrifice that. Who knows, perhaps you will surrender things to Christ until you eventually find out you've surrendered the last thing and you wind up fully surrendered, fully consecrated, and fully sanctified. Even if you reject the all, whole, through-and-through talk, you can always at least yield to the gradual, incremental, and step-by-step process. So what is the step before you now?

3. Is there one sin you could overcome?

If you reject the possibility that God has power to deliver you from *all* (intentional) sin, do you accept that he can give you enough power to overcome one sin? What is that sin? What sin has enslaved you that you can't seem to beat? Would you seek the Holy Spirit's cleansing of *that* sin. If you reject entire sanctification, would you at least seek partial sanctification? Some have sought cleansing and victory from a single sin, and when received found the result was exactly what the "entire sanctification" people were preaching about all along. So what single sin do you need God's sanctifying power to cleanse you from? Will you seek that?

4. Ask God, "If this is true, make it happen to me."

If you don't believe Christians can get this kind of power, what could you lose? Pray, "If it's true, make it happen to me." How could that hurt? While there is no faith in that kind of prayer, there is at least plenty of submission. Sometimes God answers faithless prayers like this. Certainly, you want all that God has for you, don't you? Then pray that way—tell him if this kind of life is really possible, you want it. Then wait. Sure, it isn't the ideal way to pray for healing, salvation, or the filling of the Spirit, but at least it keeps you in the right posture—waiting with open and willing hands toward God.

CENTRAL POINT

This message has been of a different sort. It is directed to those of you who are not sure you believe what you've been hearing. You are to be commended. You didn't get angry and leave in a huff for another church—one that preaches only what you already believe. You did not despise the preaching by shrugging it off as if it was only this preacher's opinion and not yours. You kept coming and listening and have been testing the truth. That is wonderful! Keep on testing the idea of ordinary people living a holy life. Keep studying the Bible and seeking testimonies to hear from real people about what God has done in their lives. Don't let people squeeze you into their own mold—God works in a variety of ways with different people. But this I do know for sure: God has more power for Christians than most draw on.

At its root, this sermon series is basically about one thing: God has power to transform ordinary Christians into extraordinary people. He gives this power gradually to Christians and also gives it in great outpourings in a moment. There was a time when people expected transformations like this to be done instantly; they mostly ignored the possibility of incremental transformation. Today, things are reversed: most Christians accept gradual transformation and ignore the possibility of God being able to transform Christians instantly. God can do both and disbelieving either way is a shame. You are destined to be holy and God will make you that way sooner or later. If he can do it sooner, why wait?

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Where are you this morning? What is your next step? No matter what you believe about sanctification and the Spirit-filled life, you certainly believe this: "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (James 4:8). In our church's tradition, we often use this place up here we call "the altar" as a place to do just that—to come near to God. As we close this service, who would come up here and kneel for a time of private prayer? To come near to God so that he might come near to you? Do you want to draw nearer to God this morning?