WEEK 6 Chapter Six

God Is Holy

In Jesus, holiness runs the wrong direction on purpose.

THE GOD NARRATIVE CHALLENGE THE NARRATIVE WE HAVE BEEN HANDED

God's holiness means God cannot come near what is unclean, and I am on the wrong side of that line. Holiness is separation, distance, and rule-keeping, and the holier people get the further away they move. My job is to clean up before God gets here.

THE NARRATIVE JESUS TELLS

Jesus reaches out and touches the man no one has touched in years, and the current runs backward. Instead of Jesus becoming unclean, the man becomes clean. Holiness in the hands of God is not a wall. It is contagious, and it moves toward what is broken.

The challenge this week: This week, identify the part of your life you assume God would rather not touch, and bring that part, specifically, into prayer.

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION

"The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness."

– John Wesley, Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems, 1739

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

– Isaiah 6:3

"The glory of God is the human being fully alive."

– Irenaeus of Lyons

SCRIPTURE FOR THE WEEK

Read: Mark 1:40–45 and Isaiah 6:1–8

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"

Mark 1:41

In Leviticus, uncleanness travels by contact. Touch what is unclean and you become unclean, and everyone standing in this scene knows it. That is what makes the man's request so daring and Jesus' hand so shocking. The expected outcome, the one the crowd braces for, is that Jesus is now unclean too. What happens instead is that the man is clean. The contagion runs backward. This is what holiness looks like when it takes on a body and

walks around. It is worth knowing that some of the oldest manuscripts read “moved with anger” rather than “moved with pity,” and that harder reading may well be the original one. Jesus is angry, not at the man, but at whatever it is that has kept him outside the camp for so long. Wesley’s insistence that there is no holiness but social holiness comes from exactly this instinct. Holiness that keeps its distance is not the holiness of God.

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QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

1. What part of your life do you quietly assume God would rather not touch?

2. Where has the church drawn a line that Jesus seems willing to walk across?

3. Who is outside the camp in our community right now? What would reaching toward them cost us?

4. Wesley said there is no holiness but social holiness. What does that ask of this class, specifically? THE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Margin

Holiness needs room. A life scheduled to the edges has no space left for God or neighbor to interrupt, and interruption is most of how both of them arrive. Margin is not laziness. It is the deliberate creation of empty space so that something other than our plans can happen in it.

- Leave ten minutes between commitments this week instead of stacking them.
- Arrive early to one thing and sit in the car without your phone.
- Take the long way home once.
- Keep one evening completely unscheduled and resist the urge to fill it.
- Notice what shows up in the space. Often it is fatigue first, and then something else.

Pay attention to what you feel when the space opens up. For many of us the first feeling is guilt, and that is worth talking about.