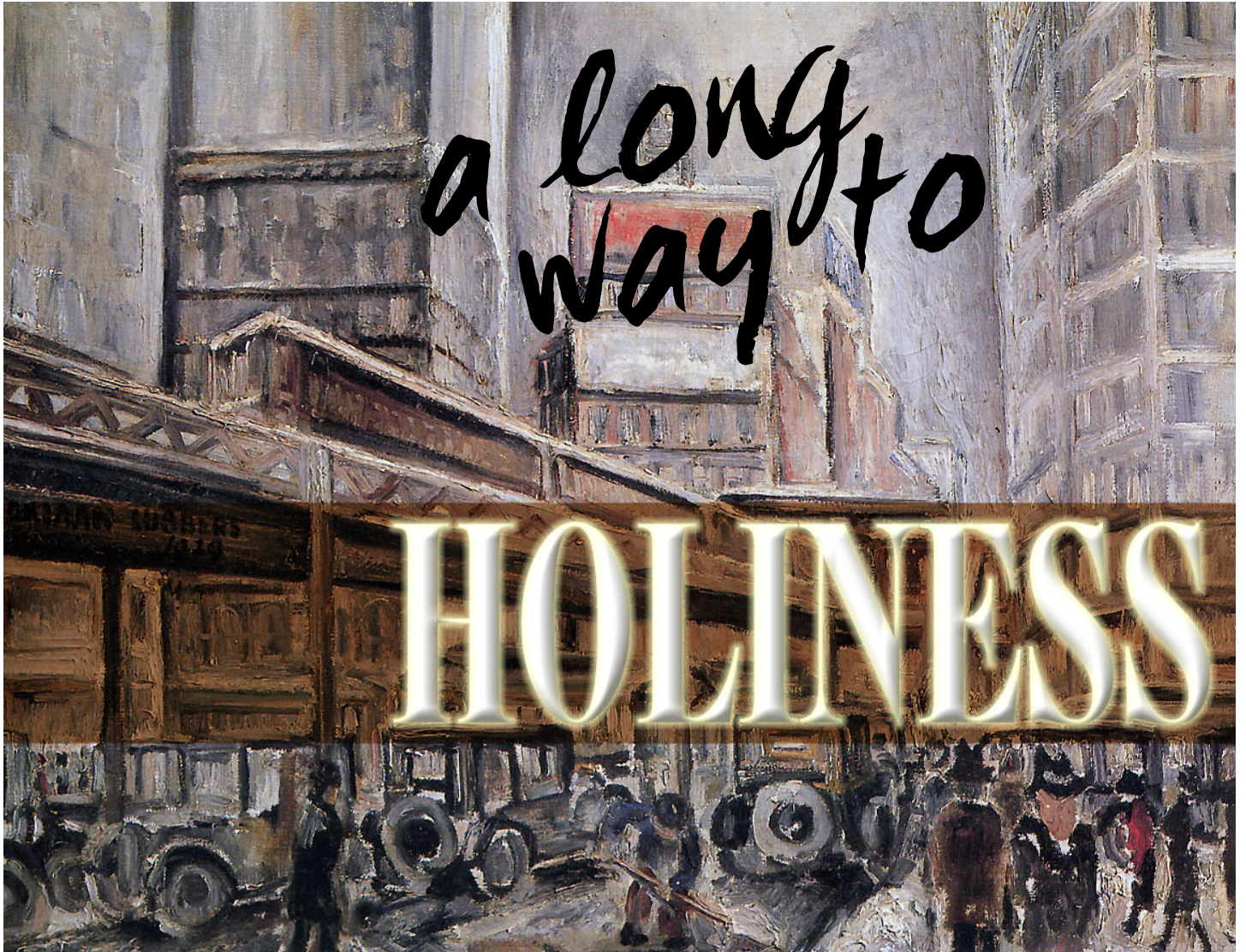


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



painting by Adriaan Lubbers

“For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.”

Issue #832, August 2019.

Reflections by the Pond is published monthly at dlampel.com and is © 2019 David S. Lampel. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible (Updated Edition). This and all of our resources are offered free-of-charge to the glory and praise of Christ our Lord.



THE STANDARD

EVERY GOAL REQUIRES A STANDARD. We never aim for nothing, and we never have as our aim to attain something less than what we already are. Setting for ourselves a goal means that we know of someone who is superior, or some accomplishment heretofore beyond our reach. Then we aim for that.

When it comes to a Christian's goal of holiness we can have only one standard: God. There would be no reason to base our goal of being holy on anything or anyone less, surely nothing now dwelling on this sad and groaning globe. Indeed, it is God Himself who assigned us this goal of being holy.

"For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

Leviticus 11:44-45

God not only *wants* us to be like Him, for our own good, He insists on it. Everything about Him is holy: His name is holy, the heaven in which He dwells is holy, the worship of Himself that He established for Israel was to be holy—sacred, pure, blameless, consecrated. No thing or individual comes into close proximity to a holy God unless it is holy as well. And this requirement remains true: some 1,500 years after the giving of the Mosaic Law, the apostle Peter wrote,

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1 Peter 1:14-16



But how are we to think of God's holiness? How are we to position it in our mind and heart? This is a challenge for mortal man, since all the examples of which we can conceive are like ourselves: created in sin, fleshly, imperfect, even base. We might posit that holiness is an *attribute* of God, but while that is true, it is also a thin perception, as if it were something tacked on extra, or at least something that changes over time.

Being chronically overweight has been one of my life-long "attributes"; it is built into my genes. But over the decades of my life there have been times I was lighter and thinner, and there have been times I was heavier than I am now. Since I am a created being my attributes change, they fluctuate, and they come and go.

Not so with God. His "attributes" are not *part* of who He is, nor are they acquired by Him, and they certainly do not change over time. We can attend to no finer teacher for grasping this challenging concept than the late, deeply spiritual teacher and pastor, A. W. Tozer.

If we would think accurately about the attributes of God, we must learn to reject certain words that are sure to come crowding into our minds—such words as *trait, characteristic, quality*, words which are proper and necessary when we are considering created beings but altogether inappropriate when we are thinking about God.

An attribute...is not a part of God. It is *how* God is, and as far as the reasoning mind can go, we may say that it is *what* God is, though, as I have tried to explain, exactly what He is He cannot tell us.

The divine attributes are what we know to be true of God. He does not possess them as qualities; they are how God is as He reveals Himself to His creatures. Love, for instance, is not something God has and which may grow or diminish or cease to be. His love is the way God is, and when He loves He is simply being Himself.

Because God is spirit-kind and man is flesh-kind there is a natural tension between the two. That, however, puts it mildly; the truth is that there is an insurmountable barrier between the two.

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Isaiah 6:1-5

Mere humans are not just unable to approach the Almighty's holiness, they cannot even comprehend it.

Neither the writer nor the reader of these words is qualified to appreciate the holiness of God. Quite literally a new channel must

be cut through the desert of our minds to allow the sweet waters of truth that will heal our great sickness to flow in. We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable. The natural man is blind to it. He may fear God's power and admire His wisdom, but His holiness he cannot even imagine.

Tozer

Even so, this unapproachable, untouchably sacred God not only desires us to be as holy as He, He commands it. Yet in the command, as voiced by Jesus the Christ during His sermon on the mount, is the assumption that holy is something that we must *become*, because holiness is not natural to us.

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
Matthew 5:48

Unlike us, God did not acquire or learn holiness. He *is* holiness. Our Father in heaven *is* complete, but we are *to be* complete.

This means it will be a process. ♦



A HIGHWAY

IT IS A LONG WAY HOME from the South China Sea to Marshalltown, Iowa. What made the journey from Vietnam seem even longer for this writer, back in the early months of 1971, was that within a few days of my arrival home I would at long last be wed to the girl whose picture had been my lifeline to sanity during those interminable months overseas.

This young swabby wanted to look his best for his girl. To that end I spent much of that long voyage home down in the hangar deck of the U. S. S. *Chicago* exercising and lifting weights. The result was that the person one sees standing next to the beautiful bride in our wedding pictures is in a state of physical perfection not witnessed again during the ensuing decades.

I had never looked better—and I never looked that good again.



Holiness, for mere flesh and blood, is a journey. Depending on the age at which one responds favorably to the gospel call and one's subsequent lifespan, it can be a very long journey. God supplies his own metaphor for this journey in His word, through the pen of the prophet Isaiah.

The scorched land will become a pool
And the thirsty ground springs of water;
In the haunt of jackals, its resting place,
Grass becomes reeds and rushes.
A highway will be there, a roadway,
And it will be called the Highway of Holiness.

The unclean will not travel on it,
But it will be for him who walks that way,
And fools will not wander on it.
No lion will be there,
Nor will any vicious beast go up on it;
These will not be found there.
But the redeemed will walk there,
And the ransomed of the LORD will return
And come with joyful shouting to Zion,
With everlasting joy upon their heads.
They will find gladness and joy,

And sorrow and sighing will flee away.

Isaiah 35:7-10

This is God's roadway to heaven, and it is an eloquent picture of the "now—not yet" of holiness. Only those who are redeemed are on this road; no one not already declared justified, sanctified, made holy by the blood of Christ may travel it. We call this *positional* sanctification. One does not travel this road to *become* redeemed; one must already be redeemed to be there. If you are on this highway, you are already sufficiently pure, by the blood of Christ, to enter the presence of the Most Holy God.

Yet it is a highway, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is a journey, it is a process. Traveling this road means that one is not the same at its end as one was at the beginning. The Highway of Holiness changes people for the better (we call this *progressive* sanctification): it improves them, it matures them, and, most of all, it makes them more like Christ.

By the time I arrived home from Vietnam, my girl would have married me no matter what I looked like. If I had gained twenty pounds and lost half my hair, she still would have walked down that aisle of the First Baptist Church. But I wanted to be at my best—for her. I wanted to look better at the end of my long journey than I did at its start. Just as every follower of Christ wants to be at his or her best when they meet their Lord face to face. Sure, He will welcome us with open arms no matter our condition. So long as our name is in The Book, the Holy Spirit is our entry badge. But because of our love for and our devotion to Christ Jesus, we travel this exalted high road so as to be more and increasingly useful to Him this side of eternity.

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but

also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

2 Timothy 2:19-22



This journey on the Highway of Holiness is not the same for every believer. Some Christians reach the end of the journey—their face-to-face meeting with the Savior—shortly after entering the roadway, whereas many, perhaps most, spend decades traveling that hallowed way. Others, sadly, take a circuitous path on an arrow-straight highway. They dawdle, they take many rest stops, and sometimes they even take a premature exit, only to reenter the highway later.

For them, holiness is like a precious Christmas gift tragically left unopened beneath the tree. There it is, beautifully wrapped and even more beautiful inside its wrappings, but left alone. The child for whom it has been pur-

chased has been foolishly entranced by lesser gifts—puerile, vain, even tawdry gifts—and has gone off to play with them, ignoring the priceless one, leaving it behind.

Every believer, to varying degrees, has at times opened the cheap trinkets of this fallen world and been beguiled by them, ignoring God’s beautiful, priceless gift of holiness. For it is a gift, paid for by the life of His Son. If it is at all possible for an all-powerful God to spend until it hurts, He did it at Golgotha.

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”... And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Mark 15:33-34, 37-38

Remaining resolutely on the Highway is not just opening the gift, but living day in and day out with its inherent joys. And the highest joy is to be changed, a small bit at a time, into the image of the Lord. ◆



photo by Slideshow Bruce

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

WE LIVE, ACCORDING TO political writer John Hinderaker, in “degraded times.” The truth of that succinct phrase cannot be denied. Every day we hear or read of behavior so rabidly bestial, so vile, that it causes us to challenge the wisdom of the Creator in placing man over the beasts of the field. It is not even fair to label it “bestial,” for animals—true beasts—do not behave in such a loathsome manner. It would be more accurate to label the societal behavior of so many today as “maniel.” Such outrageous behavior and language, such as publicly calling for the death of a public official was once sufficient cause for arrest, or at least a straitjacket. Now it is lauded, and pasted across all forms of media as a glowing example of civic righteousness.

When faced with such displays of gruesome depravity, there are days when the concept of holiness seems absurd. How can we hope to attain to such a high standard as God’s holiness in a world where just quiet, common decency is ridiculed? Is it even *possible* now to be obedient to God’s call to be holy because He is holy?

Is it possible for a Christian pursuing holiness to operate in this world, to have gainful employment in the world of business? Can a Christian on the way to the holiness of God be a successful vehicle salesman? As reasonably pleasant as it was purchasing our new car, for example, the salesman cited a ridiculously low figure for the “wiggle room” he had for negotiating the final price. He lied. Was he a follower of Christ? Did he consider himself to be a Christian? I can’t answer that, but I can say with confidence that using deceit in your daily business is not the way to holiness.

Is it possible to live in this world yet not be of it? Does the Highway of Holiness remain a viable option in these “degraded times?” In the exhausted memoir entitled *Ecclesiastes*, King Solomon gives us an answer. This wearied journal contains chapter after chapter filled with accounts of futility, folly, and vanity.

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun. I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-6

As the same writer declared earlier in his memoir, there is nothing new under the sun. With his words he paints a terrifying picture that could narrate today’s pages of Facebook or Twitter. One can only conclude that evil is in the ascendant, while goodness and holiness are being trod into extinction under the feet of anarchists. In the words of wise Solomon, however, nothing has changed. Nothing has changed from that epochal moment the Lord God wiped His hands of the mud from which He had just fashioned the first man.

The end of the whole matter let us hear: Fear God, and keep His commands, for this is the whole of man. For every work doth God bring into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether good or bad.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ylt

Fear God, and keep His commands. Nothing has changed: God is still on His throne; our obedience, our holiness are still important to Him.

When we, even as Christians, forsake the ways of God in favor of the ways of this world it is, more often than not, because we are afraid of what others will think of us. That is, we are

more afraid of other human beings than we are of a holy and righteous God. But in His word God says that before anything or anyone else we are to fear *Him*—to revere Him, to respect Him, to make Him the object of our devotion. Those treading the Lord’s Highway of Holiness don’t care what those *not* on the highway think of them. They care only what the One who is the goal of their pursuit thinks of them. Their eyes are on Him and Him alone. He is their all, the brightness of their being.



In biblical parlance, to be a “son” is to be far more than simply a lineal descendant of a father. In Scripture, to be a “son” means that you look like and *behave* like your father. It means that when people see you and your behavior, they see in you the behavior of your father. This is what Jesus meant when He said in His sermon on the mount,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:43-48

To pursue holiness is to pursue a likeness to God. When we nurture a life that thinks and behaves like Christ Jesus, we are nurturing a life that looks and behaves like Father God, for, as Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”

For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things

the Son also does in like manner.

John 5:18-19

Thus to pursue holiness is to set ourselves in opposition to the ways of this world. That is a built-in part of the process; to pursue holiness, to live like a “son” of God, is to live *unlike* this world, but like His world.

The call for every believer is to live *in* this world, but live *for* the next.



When I became a Cub Scout, there was a manual. When I graduated to the Boy Scouts, there was a manual. These handy books told a boy how to build fires, tie knots, dress a wound, how to identify flora and fauna and how to be respectful toward others—in other words, how to grow into a responsible, healthy young man with invaluable practical knowledge. My wife had a similar manual in the Girl Scouts that taught her how to grow into a responsible, healthy young woman. When we got our first computer, back in the 1980s, it came with a manual, and the programs we first ran on it—*Wordstar* and *Lotus 1-2-3*—each came with an exhaustive manual that described in detail every menu item and operation of which the programs were capable. If one wanted to know how to use either program to its fullest, one had only to read the manual.

God comes with a manual. In it one finds exhaustive, detailed information about Him and His ways—which is all one needs to learn how to pursue holiness. One has only to read the manual. Obey what God says in His word and you will be on that Highway of Holiness, growing, maturing in Him and His ways, becoming more like Him and His Son Jesus, learning to be guided by His Holy Spirit rather than the spirit of this world.

Solomon had it right: The end of the matter is to fear God, and keep His commands. That’s it.

Holiness does not happen overnight, and it rarely happens on-schedule. It takes time—a lifetime—and there will be many bumps along the way. But enter His Highway and start reading the manual.

Don’t learn God from this world; learn God from Him. Learn holiness to *be* holy—like your Father in heaven. ◆