

# Evidence of Growth In Holiness

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] In our Sunday school series on holiness, it was originally scheduled for five or six, and now it's going to be stretched out to eight, so we're about halfway done. We've seen so far that holiness is not optional. We've seen what holiness is. Last week we saw holiness is possible, and today I want to look at what does progress in holiness look like?

What does progress look like? I think one of the most difficult, one of the most challenging, perhaps discouraging things about holiness is that it is very easy for us to think about it as an all or nothing. And we forget that it is a process. Progressive holiness is a process. And on top of that, it's a process that can be hard and it can be difficult to measure.

It can be difficult to evaluate. Am I growing? And when, I don't know about you, but when I'm doing something, and I'm doing it over and over again, and yet it's hard for me to know if I'm making progress, it can be very easy for me to be discouraged and want to give up.

Growing in holiness is not like losing weight. If I set the goal to, I want to lose weight, that's a fairly easy thing to measure, isn't it?

[1:33] I get on the scale, if the number is going down, then I'm losing weight. I'm accomplishing my goal. Progressive sanctification is more like health. It's not the same as getting on the scale.

It involves how I feel, how much I weigh, my flexibility, my strength, my ability to fight diseases, my ability to sleep, how my digestion is working, how my organs are working.

Progressing in health is hard to measure. It's hard to get a grip on sometimes because it's just so difficult to test. And so when we tend to look at holiness as all or nothing, that can be discouraging. And when we look at it as something very difficult, or it can be difficult to measure, that can be discouraging. But the Bible doesn't talk about it as an all or nothing. And so we don't have to wait to go to heaven, so to speak, to be holy.

Are we going to be more holy? Are we going to be absolutely holy in heaven? Yes. But we can be holy to some degree here on earth. And so holiness is something we can grow in right now.

[2:46] And so really the purpose today is to encourage you in this process. And the way that I want to encourage you is by saying, Okay, now how can I look at my life and evaluate?

Am I progressing or not? So I'm going to give you seven ways to test your progress in holiness. Seven ways to test your progress in holiness. And I will say at the beginning that this is not comprehensive.

After I finished this lesson, I thought about five more ways that you could see if you're growing in holiness. So if you think of other ways, good.

This is seven that I came up with for today. And again, I hope this encourages you on to holiness. I hope that it encourages you to see that God is at work in your life. And that you can grow.

And so seven points. And they aren't in much of an order. There's some loose logic to the order. But don't put too much weight on which comes where.

[3:56] So number one. What does progress look like? It looks like a change in where the battle with sin is happening.

A change in where the battle with sin is happening. So growth doesn't necessarily mean an end to the fight.

But it can look like a change in where that fighting is taking place. So let me give you an earthly example that might be easier for you to understand.

Let's go back to World War II. It's December 1941. And we're on the eastern front where the Germans and the Russians are fighting.

They are fighting. They are fighting in the very suburbs of Moscow itself. They are knocking on Moscow's door.

[4:57] And things are desperate. The Soviet Union has raised up all their reserves. They've moved all their troops from the Far East, from Siberia. They've thrown everything into a counteroffensive to protect Moscow, to drive the Germans back from their capital.

So that's December 1941. We fast forward three years later, December 1944. The Germans and the Russians are still fighting.

But now they are in Poland. Russia has made progress. There was no point where they ended the battle.

Not yet. But the change, there was progress. Progress wasn't an end of the battle. It was a change in the place where the battle was taking, was occurring. So what does progress in holiness look like?

It looks like this. Instead of anger flaring up in a conversation between a husband and a wife. So instead of this outward battle between a husband and a wife.

[6:06] Now the anger is being dealt with and fought with in the heart. So now we're not fighting it outside. We're fighting it on the inside.

We're fighting it before the words can ever come out of our mouth. So to some degree, we're still wrestling with anger. But now the fighting isn't, we haven't let it slip out.

We're not arguing and yelling and screaming at each other. So there's still a fight, but the battlefield has changed. And that's progress in holiness. It's not perfection. It's progress.

It's growth in holiness. And so another example. Instead of looking at pornography on your computer, you are now fighting the battle with lust in your mind. You're still struggling with desires, but you are fighting it in the mind.

Not outside. So the battlefield has changed. It's not perfection. They're still fighting to do. It's not to be satisfied, but it is progress.

[7:09] And so take heart. If the field of battle is changing, that very well could be progress. God is at work. You are growing in holiness. Keep up the fight.

Too often we want a decisive victory. And most of the time, this battle, this fight, this pursuit of holiness is won step by step, not in some epic showdown.

So don't give up. That's number one. What does progress look like? It looks like a change in where this fighting with sin is taking place. Number two. What does progress look like?

Progress looks like less frequent sinning in particular areas. Less frequent sinning in particular areas.

Less falls is progress. Maybe you struggle with worry and anxiety. Some of us struggle with those things.

[8:09] Some of us, that's not a besetting sin. But let's say for you it is. And you know it's a sin. And you've been fighting against it. You've been memorizing God's promises.

You've been praying. You've been on the guard, watching out for when worry and anxiety happen to you. You've been praying.

You're still wrestling with your feelings. And now you are only falling into worry and anxiety once a week. Instead of every day of the week.

Or instead of four days of the week. Maybe it's despair and depression. Maybe there are times where you just give in to that.

To the depression and the despair and the hopelessness. And perhaps it used to be that was four days out of your week. You were just down. But you've been wrestling and you've been fighting against it.

[9:09] And now it's two days a week. That's progress. It's progress. Is there still further to go? Yes. Yes. But holiness is growing.

And so don't quit the fight. God is at work. It's not an end of the fight. But it is less falls. And that is progress. And again, I'm trying to fight against this idea that it's either all or nothing.

And when we think it's all or nothing, every fall is just to say, I'm totally defeated. Well, not necessarily. Number three.

What does progress look like? This one's related somewhat to the first. It's a change in the form of the sin itself. That's progress.

And this one, I think you need to think about carefully. So let's say at one point we were having angry words. Our anger was coming out with swearing and hitting and insults.

[10:15] Insults. And now there's just angry thoughts and angry feelings. It's not total victory.

But it is progress. I heard a story not too long ago, a couple weeks ago. Some folks were visiting a church. So they're visiting.

They've never been there before. They came up to the pastor afterward and they said, we really like the service. We like your preaching, etc. But there were some people smoking out front.

They were smoking when we came in by the front door. And the pastor said, what were they smoking? And they said, cigarettes. And he said, cigarettes.

That's great. That's progress. You should have seen what they were smoking before. Now, again, he was saying, you know what?

[11 : 14] There is progress. If you go from having an affair to struggling with immoral thoughts, that's progress and sexual purity.

If the form of your sin is changing to a less openly evil form, a less obviously rebellious form, that can be progress.

So keep fighting. Don't be satisfied. None of this is to ever say, just be satisfied and you've gone far enough. But don't lose heart either.

Don't lose heart. Keep at it. We're making incredible progress here. Number four. It means less time in the doghouse.

What do I mean? I mean, less time where you are staying in your guilt and your sin, less time of feeling sorry for yourself and saying, God won't receive me.

[12 : 18] God won't forgive me. God doesn't love me. I can't come to him. I can't ask for forgiveness yet. He won't forgive me yet. That's what I'm talking about being in the doghouse.

I think we pretty much always have a sort of knee-jerk reaction after we sin.

And when we sin, the knee-jerk reaction is to become a legalist, to think that it was really all my performance and that God won't forgive me.

We always have to re-remember the gospel after a fall. And I think a lot of times, as we grow in holiness, that time shortens.

The gospel becomes more of a, we understand it more, we appreciate it more, it becomes more of a response. But so often we forget that the gospel is for actual sinners.

[13 : 25] It's for actual sinners. Jesus didn't die in theory for theoretical sinners. He died for real sin. And so often we're surprised that we have real sin in our life.

And that there's real grace that responds to that real sin for us. Martin Luther wrote to his best friend Melancthon.

And he said, If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true, not a fictitious grace.

If grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners.

And that's precisely what we have to convince people of. That they are not fictitious sinners. But they are real sinners.

[14 : 26] And that's what we have to really understand about ourselves. That we are, we're not fictitious sinners. We actually do real sin. And grace is real grace.

Grace doesn't meet us in our goodness. Grace doesn't meet us in our righteousness. It meets us in our sin. And it receives us out of the pig pen.

And to grow in holiness means that that doubting and that wavering of whether to believe that we're actual sinners, that God is really gracious.

Just staying in the doghouse is theoretical Christianity. It's to say, I believe in grace. I believe in sin. But when it confronts me in my real life, I'm unprepared for it.

And it seems that we are shocked that we've actually sinned. And that God really has mercy for real sinners. And so growing in holiness means leaving our sin straight away and going to Christ for cleansing.

[15 : 30] Now, I want to be careful here. I said a couple weeks ago that we have a tendency to cure ourselves too quickly. We slap a Band-Aid on.

We don't do real repentance. I'm not contradicting those two things. But what I am saying is we do real repentance.

We really condemn ourselves. We do it quicker. And the reason that we do repentance is because we believe in Jesus Christ.

We think that God will accept me. And so are you sinning but then spending less time in the doghouse?

You're getting up. You're repenting. You're believing. Are you finding yourself quicker at the feet of Jesus? Hating your sin but embracing his mercy? That's progress.

[16:27] That's real progress. You're growing closer to God. Remember what we talked about. Holiness is giving your heart to God. That's one of the things that holiness is.

And so you're growing closer to God. You're believing more. You're giving God your heart quicker in humility and dependence and reliance. You're trusting him. And that's what holiness looks like in this world of sin that we live in.

And so less time in the doghouse. Going to Christ for washing and cleansing quicker. That's growing in holiness. So number five.

What does progress look like? We have a greater sensitivity to sin as sin. We have a greater sensitivity to sin as sin.

Growing in holiness shows itself in a growing hatred of sin as sin. So turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 7. Romans chapter 7.

[17:32] And look at... Well, we'll begin in verse 11.

And we're going to read through verse 13. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me.

And through the commandment, put me to death. So then the law is holy. And the commandment is holy, righteous, and good. Did that which is good then...

He's talking about the law. Did that which was good, the law, then become death to me? By no means. But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good.

So that through the commandment, sin might become utterly sinful. That's a very peculiar way of putting things.

[18:35] Very peculiar way of putting things. There's only one word to describe how evil our sin is. And it's the word sin. The law shows us the sinfulness of sin.

It shows us the nature of sin. The true wickedness, the vileness, the sinfulness of sin. And so what Paul is doing for us is showing us that we have a tendency to paint sin, to masquerade sin as something less than what it is.

But the law shows us what sin really is. Now, unbelievers, obviously, of course, do this. But we as believers can do it.

So we as believers, we tend to think sin is just a personal defeat. It's a personal defeat. And so when we think about our sin, we think about how we haven't measured up to our standards.

And that's why we're surprised that we've sinned. Because I thought I was better than that. But here I am. I'm not any better than what I thought I was. And again, we're measuring our sin by ourselves.

[19:54] And so when we sin, we get sad because I failed my own standards. But sin is not first falling short of my standards. Sin is not first falling short of what I think I am capable of.

And what I should be doing. Because I am who I am. We call it weakness. Weakness. And for sure it's weakness. But again, we're thinking of our sin as it relates to us.

But the law exposes sin for what it is. See, the law puts sin in its proper context. We have a tendency to put it in our own personal context.

In our own view of ourselves and our lives and what we're capable of. But the law exposes sin for what it is. It's rebellion against God. It's looking God and his commandments which are holy.

What does he say? Holy, righteous, and good. All those things. It's looking what is holy, righteous, and good in the face. And doing the exact opposite. It's fighting against God.

[21:03] It's opposing God. It's opposing that which is holy, righteous, and good. And so sin delights in what is evil. It delights in what is wicked.

It delights in what is perverse. And the law makes it clear where we stand when we sin.

Just how bad our sin is. And it shows us that we are fighting against God. We're rebelling against God. We are doing that which is evil.

We have a hard time putting that on our actions. We call it falling short. We call it a personal defeat. We call it weakness. But the law calls it evil. Now, as you grow in holiness, you measure sin against God and his law more and more.

And you hate sin for what it is more and more. And so what I'm saying is growing in holiness is seeing sin as against God more.

[22 : 12] So I quit thinking about sin primarily as a defeat for myself. No, I hate it because God hates it. I hate it because it's warring against my Father in Heaven.

I hate it because it's something personal against God. And I don't want to sin against my Father who has loved me.

I don't want to do that which is evil because I love what is righteous. And so we start to see sin as personally against God. It's personal to Him. It's not merely breaking some law that's separate from God.

It's against God that loves me. And so I hate it. See, true hatred for sin comes out of a love for God. True hatred for sin comes out of a love for God. All kinds of people hate sin for all kinds of reasons. They hate sin. Well, you tell me.

[23 : 14] Why do they hate sin? It holds them back. What else? I hate its consequences.

I hate its consequences. It's embarrassing. It's shameful. We don't want to go to hell.

So I hate sin for its consequences. I hate sin for what it's doing to me. But true hatred, biblical hatred, repentance that is real comes out of a love for God.

Because sin and God are opposites. I can't love sin and love God. I can't love the one without hating the other.

And so the flesh and the spirit are at loggerheads. They are in constant conflict. They are opposite principles. You can't live to both at the same time. You can't love God and this world.

[24 : 09] You either hate the one and love the other or vice versa. You can't love God and not hate sin. Because sin is the opposite of God. And so now I say, as I grow into holiness, I'm looking less to the consequences.

But I'm looking more to the personal side. That I don't want to sin against my father. I don't want to sin against God who loves me.

And so you hate sin more for what it is. Not for how it makes you feel. Not for what you're going to, the consequences for it. But for what it is. And that's progress.

That's progress. That's growing in holiness of heart. God is getting more of your heart. More of your heart is directed to him. It's more in line with him. It's more in line with his priorities.

And so that's growth. Number six. What does progress look like? It looks like a growing awareness of the little things.

[25 : 13] The growing, a greater awareness of the little things. So not only are we conscious of sin as sin. We are more conscious of sin and righteousness in the little things.

Our consciences are becoming more sensitive. Our love is becoming more precise. Our obedience is becoming more precise. More thoughtful.

And our hatred of sin is becoming more thorough. So I'm not just hating the big obvious things. I'm hating every little manifestation of sin. And I'm not just loving righteousness as a big picture.

But I love every little manifestation of righteousness. So are we more conscious of our sin and more conscious of the righteousness of the little things.

Of like how we spend our minutes and our hours. Those little interactions. Those little bits of time.

[26 : 13] Those little conversations. Those little duties. Those little things. We don't want to just have the big obvious sins taken care of.

And the big obvious virtues in place. We want holiness to pervade our whole life. Why? Because that's how God is.

That's how God is. God is holy in all that he does. He hates evil in every kind of form. No matter the size.

And as we grow in holiness. We grow in God likeness. We become more like him. We do as he does. And that means precise obedience.

And hating precise sins. So we sing that song. I want a principle within. Of watchful. Godly. Fear. A sensibility of sin.

[27 : 12] A pain to feel it near. I want the first approach to feel. Of pride or wrong desire. To catch the wandering of my will. And quench the kindling fire.

So we're not talking about dealing with the forest fire. We're talking about the little fire. The spark. Of sin. I want to quench it. Quick as the apple of an eye.

Oh God my conscience make. Awake my soul when sin is nigh. And keep it still awake. Growing in holiness means a growing watchfulness.

I'm not just aware of the big things. I'm now aware of the little things. Well what does progress look like? Greater awareness of the small things. Turn over in your Bibles to Matthew 23.

Matthew 23. Could someone read verses 23 and 24? Verses 23 and 24.

[28:13] Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees. You hypocrites. You give a tenth of your spices. Mint. Dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of all.

Justice. Mercy. And faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter. Without neglecting a former. You blind guys. You strain out a gnat. But swallow a camel. Okay.

Now you notice what Jesus doesn't say. What Jesus isn't doing. And sometimes I think we miss the. Or we sidestep this point.

Jesus doesn't say. What are you doing? Don't worry about the small things. Just worry about the big things. He doesn't say that. He doesn't berate them.

For straining out the gnat. You notice that? He doesn't berate them. He doesn't insult them. Or say. What are you straining out gnats for?

[29:12] He berates them for swallowing the camel. For ignoring justice and mercy. Mercy and faithfulness. But is there anything wrong. If you have a drink.

To strain out the gnat. No. Just last night. I was getting into bed. And I looked in my cup.

And there was a little gnat. In my water. And you know what? I didn't drink it down. I didn't. There's nothing wrong. With being careful.

About the little things. Now. We can. Obviously fall into. What the Pharisees did. And they were so meticulous.

And about the little things. But meanwhile. They're ignoring mercy. And faithfulness. They're ignoring. What it means to love. And so they're. They're. Oh.

[30:06] So particular about. Straining out the gnats. And Jesus is saying. You're drinking down camels. But there's nothing wrong. With being careful. About the smallest sins.

About the smallest virtues. He doesn't say. Why are you. Tithing. Your garden herbs. He says. Why aren't you loving people?

So. Be perfect. As your father in heaven. Is perfect. God says. Be holy. As I am holy. So be holy. In. All that you do.

Be holy. In all that you do. Be holy. Not just in the big things. But in the little things. Now. What does progress look like? Well.

You're. You're more aware. Of how righteousness. And sin. Are involved in the little things. You're. You're now working on little things. Little conversations. Little interactions.

[31:04] The small uses of time. The small uses of money. You're thinking about. What does God have to do. With this money. Not thousands of dollars. But twenty dollars.

Fifty dollars. Not big. Epic conversations. But the conversation between. A. Dad. And his. Son. As they're going through the kitchen.

The little interactions. Because life. Is. Mostly made up of small things. Isn't it? Small interactions. So. Progress. And holiness.

Means you're thinking more. About those small things. So. Are you doing that? Don't be discouraged. Be encouraged. God's at work. There's more to do.

But. You're making progress. Well. Number seven. Progress. And holiness. Looks like a greater. Sensitivity.

[32:00] To your relationship. With God. God. A greater. A greater. Sensitivity. To your relationship. To God. Is your Christian life.

Becoming. More relational. With God. God. We've thought a lot. About Enoch. The last few weeks. Are you walking.

With him more. And are you more sensitive. Of that walk. Are you more sensitive. To his absence. Or is God always absent to you.

Are you more sensitive. To his absence. More aware. Of how important. Your walk is. That's progress. More time with God. Less time living.

Life on your own. Bigger chunks of your day. Marked by. Shooting up those prayers. To heaven. More time. Of your day. Thinking. About what God. Has to do with you. There's less time. Where God is absent.

[33:00] From your thoughts. Less time. Where you're living. As an orphan. There's more times. That you're living. As a son. There's less time. Where you're living. Like it's all up to you.

There's more time. With you. Living. Relying on his love. And so there's more time. With you. Saying with Paul. But we know.

And rely. On the love. God has for us. That isn't. Some sort of. Systematic. Theology thought. That is an everyday. Sort of thought. From Paul. I'm going through. This day. And I'm relying. I know. God's love for me. It's not just.

A sentence. That the Bible says. But it's something. That's real to me. And I'm relying. On that love. I'm doing things. Differently. Because I know.

[33 : 54] God loves me. I'm not giving in. To sin. Because I know. God loves me. I'm watching out. For sin. And temptation. Because I know. God loves me. And you know what?

I'm not going through. My whole day. Defeated. Because I. I'm relying. On God's love. And in my reliance. In my faith. In God's love. I'm doing things. I'm stretching myself.

Because I know. He loves me. So we know it. There's less doubting. There's more knowing. Less wondering. Does God love me? But more rejoicing. In that God does love me. It's more getting. Comfort from his promises. Less getting comfort. From the things. Of this world. More delighting. In the things. God delights in. Less delighting.

In the things. That the world. Delights in. That God doesn't care. About. Someone last week. Asked me. To try to. Remember. We were talking about. Benevolent love.

[34 : 50] And complacent love. Benevolent love. Is that disposition. Of love. Complacent love. Is that resting. And enjoying. In love. Love. And. And we were talking about. How God has benevolent love. And he also has.

Complacent love. And. But we also talked about. That. From the other side. Of the relationship. Not only does God. Have a complacent love. Toward me. But I too.

Have a complacent. Resting. Enjoying love. In him. And. Someone asked me. To try to flesh that out. And. That's a hard thing. It's a hard thing.

Because it's a relationship. How do you describe. A relationship. That is growing. How do you describe. How that feels. And what that's like.

Well. There's greater. Delight in each other. So. If. If a romance. Is blooming. There's greater delight. In one another. If a husband and wife.

[35 : 45] Relationship is growing. There's more enjoyment. Of. Of the other person. There's more. Comfortable time. With each other. You don't put on. Heirs. You know how it is.

When you're first. Getting to know someone. You're almost a different person. Than what you are. In real life. But. As your relationship. Grows. The error. Stops. The putting on the mask. Stops. You become more. You. And you're not pretending. To be something. That you aren't. You're just you. And you share. You don't hide things.

You freely share. Because you feel safe. It's the same way. With God. You know that God really does care for you. He's not pouncing on you.

He's not a fault finder. Or a nitpicker. We know that he is love. And love. Hopes all things. It puts the best spin on people. God sees us accurately.

[36 : 42] He's not fooling himself. And he's not hiding our sin. But he does see us in love. He puts the best possible construction. On us.

And as we grow in our relationship. We discover that about him. We know him more. And growing in your walk with God. Means you live in his love. You live in the joy of who he is.

And it means that. You're beginning to enjoy communion with God. God. And I'll even say more than that. It means you're beginning to enjoy communion with each person of the Trinity.

There's communion with God. And then there's communion with each person of the Trinity distinctly. It's not just generic God. But it's God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit.

And growing in holiness means that you begin to have fellowship with each of those persons distinctly. So you rejoice in your Father's love.

[37 : 47] You rejoice in the grace of Jesus Christ. In his fullness of grace. He gives you one thing after another. And you live in that. You rejoice in the Spirit's fellowship.

His friendship. His partnership with you. And you begin to see one from the other. So to speak. You begin to experience God as a Trinity.

So what does progress in holiness look like? What I'm trying to say is God has more of your heart. He's taking more and more of your thoughts.

And the world is growing dim. Death is starting to look inviting. The world is getting thin.

And you would gladly just slip through the veil to be with him. And you're seeing that more and more that he's not far away. And more and more that he's really all that will satisfy you.

[38:48] And so with an open heart you respond to God. And you obey God. You obey God.

You obey God when you don't feel like it. Because you're persuaded that what he is and who he is is true. Your feelings are becoming less important to you. Even if you are enjoying more of those feelings that come from the Christian faith.

Those things aren't driving all of your obedience. Instead you have knowledge of who God is. You have faith in who God is. And so your feelings might be there. They might not be. But what drives you is that principle that I will please him because I know him.

And that's progress. And so are you becoming more and more jealous of your relationship with God? More and more jealous of your relationship.

Are you guarding it more? Are you more careful about sin and about holiness? Not because you're afraid God is going to disown you. But because you have found the pearl of greatest price. And he is worth protecting.

[39:53] That relationship is worth guarding. If you're thinking that more and more, that's progress in holiness. So what does progress look like? It's a change in the battlefield.

It's less frequent sinning in particular areas. It's a change in the nature or the form of the sin. It's less time in the doghouse. It's greater sensitivity to sin. As sin.

And a greater awareness of little things. And last, it's a greater sensitivity to your relationship with God. And so brothers and sisters, it doesn't matter so much where you are presently.

It does matter very much which direction you're going. Okay? We all begin this Christian life very different places. Our background has so much to do with it.

So it doesn't matter so much where you are presently. But it does matter very much which direction are you going. Are you making progress? Are you going the right direction? And this is what I would just end with.

[40:54] Our holiness is our happiness. As creatures, new creatures in Jesus Christ, the only way we are going to be happy is to be holy. And so our holiness is our happiness.

And our holiness is God's honor. And so let's make every effort to be holy. We are dismissed.