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## 12. Holy Living

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Free media and discipleship resources for pastors, leaders, and growing disciples.

## 12. Holy Living

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This Bible study lesson is based on Chapters 13 – 15 of *The Abiding Room*, a book by Kevin Seacat.

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### **God Is Holy**

“Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44 NIV).

In this final lesson, we’ll look at another Biblical illustration of the reality of the Abiding Room—the temple of God. We’ll see how the Abiding Room is actually the holy place of God where we dwell in His presence.

### **The Definition of Holiness**

God describes Himself as holy. Holy means to be set apart. It means absolutely pure, perfect, or sacred.

Holiness is the essence of who God is, and because He is holy, He cannot be pleased with anything impure. And since there is nothing good in our flesh (Romans 7:18 NIV), God cannot be pleased with His children when we are living in the flesh. But our actions are always pleasing to Him when we are filled, led, and empowered by His Holy Spirit. Even in our imperfect, human state, as a loving Father, God is pleased with His children when we’re living in the Spirit.

### **Encountering God’s Holy Presence**

Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly emphasizes His holiness. When people encounter God’s holiness, it is overwhelming and can be terrifying.

In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, as God gave Moses and Aaron His regulations for living lives of cleanliness and presenting acceptable offerings to Him, He said: “For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44–45 NIV).

When God was about to save the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt, He appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The voice of God didn't proclaim His love to Moses, but rather God's own holiness. When Moses encountered God, it wasn't a comfortable experience. It was a frightening one, a momentous event that was recounted in the early church more than 1,000 years later in the book of Acts: "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt'" (Acts 7:30-34 NIV).

Later, Moses asked God to show him His ways so he might know how to find favor in God's sight. God responded by saying His face of unfathomable goodness and holiness could not be looked upon even by Moses, the man of God: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.' Moses said, 'Please show me your glory.' And he said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name "The Lord." And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.' And the Lord said, 'Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen'" (Exodus 33:17-23 NIV).

At the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, the apostle John gets a glimpse of Jesus seated on His throne in heaven, and the overwhelming spectacle of heavenly creatures worshiping Him day and night without ceasing. They never stop praising God and His holiness: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8 NIV).

Ignoring or underestimating the importance of the holiness of God leads to a diminished relationship with God. The insightful author and thinker of the previous century, A.W. Tozer, writing on God's holiness in his classic book on the nature of

God, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, wrote, “Because he [God] is holy, his attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy.”

## **The Tabernacle and Temple of God**

The reality that God’s holiness sets Him apart from sinful mankind is clearly illustrated in physical terms in the architecture of His temple. There, God is distinctly separated from man.

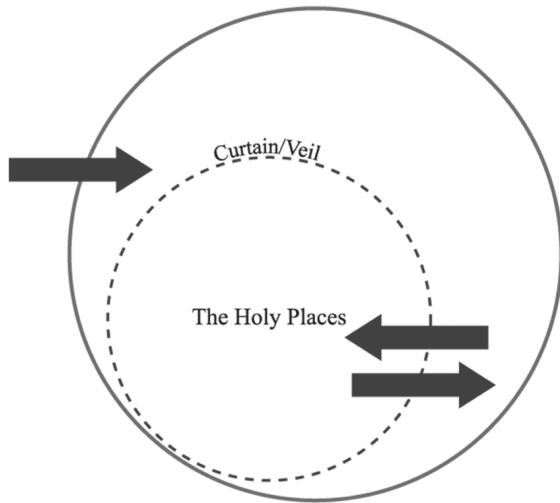
As the Israelites wandered in the desert in the early chapters of the Old Testament, God was with them in the first temple called the tabernacle. The tabernacle could be disassembled and moved when God instructed them.

Many years after the Israelites had entered the Holy Land, Solomon built an extraordinary temple for God in Jerusalem. Solomon’s temple was destroyed around 586 BC. Later, the prophet Ezekiel received a vision of another magnificent temple that, to date, has not yet been built. Centuries after Ezekiel’s vision, King Herod had another temple built. It was less magnificent than Solomon’s temple, and, in AD 70, it was also destroyed.

While people may look at the architecture and marvel at one temple more than others or compare the temple of God with other man-made structures, the true magnificence of any temple is due to God’s presence.

Physically, one of the commonalities is that each temple consisted of essentially three parts—the outer court, the inner court, and the holy places. God resided in the innermost part of each temple—the holy places. In the Old Testament, only the priests had access to the holy places, and they entered for the purpose of making sacrifices for the sins of the people.

The holy places consisted of both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. We will refer to them together as the holy places, which is the term the book of Hebrews uses, as we will see shortly. The Abiding Room is the holy place of God. We can depict the holy places as Level III, as shown in the next diagram:



## The Glory of God Fills the Temple

In the Old Testament, there are descriptions of special events where the glory of God fills the temple. Each is an overwhelming occasion.

Moses experienced this with the first temple, which was referred to as the tabernacle: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34-35 NIV).

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, whose construction he oversaw, the glory of the Lord again overwhelmed the people as it filled the temple: “As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever’” (2 Chronicles 7:1-3 NIV).

The prophet Ezekiel describes a truly awesome experience as the glory of the Lord fills the temple: “And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen

when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple” (Ezekiel 43:2-5 NIV).

God’s presence, power, majesty, and holiness are in His temple and are apparent to all who encounter Him. Throughout history, God’s glory filling the temple was a staggering revelation of God to man.

## **Jesus Made a Way into the Holy Places**

Much as God dramatically revealed the salvation of mankind through the parting of the Red Sea, He revealed a new relationship with mankind through the profound tearing of the temple veil that separated us from the holy places: “From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land ... And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open” (Matthew 27:45, 50-52 NIV).

God tore the veil in a way only He could—from top to bottom—at the exact moment Jesus died for mankind’s sins. The tearing of the veil symbolized the death of Jesus made a way we could enter into the presence of God. By Jesus’ blood, a new covenant (agreement) with mankind had begun, and we can now have a wonderful abiding fellowship with God through Jesus.

In the Old Testament, the priests entered the holy places to repeatedly make sacrifices on behalf of the people for their sin. But now, because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the cross for your sin, He has made a way for you to enter into fellowship with your Holy God.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:11-14 NIV).

There is no more need for a physical temple where priests make sacrifices for your sins. Jesus' death means you can experience intimate fellowship with God without the need for a physical temple: "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:24-26 NIV).

Jesus made a way for you to enter into the holy places that were once off-limits to ordinary people like us. He made a way for you to enter that no longer requires the blood of animals. You can walk through this door that is made possible by His blood.

Because God is holy, however, the presence of any sin must be addressed. The wondrous reality of entering the holy places of precious intimacy with Jesus exists by God's grace but requires your humble submission. You may approach the throne of Jesus having first responded in faith by confession and repentance of any sin the Holy Spirit reveals to you. The writer of Hebrews describes your confident entry into God's presence this way: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:19-22 NIV).

## **Fear Has Been Replaced by Joy**

The Abiding Room is the holy places. Jesus has made the holy rooms once reserved exclusively for priests the new Abiding Room for ordinary people like you and me! Jesus has made a way so that the holy places even priests once entered with fear can now be entered by all God's children with joy. Fear has been replaced by joy!

The reality of this new privilege gets even better. Jesus sets no time limit on how long you can remain in His holy presence. It is up to you. As long as you abide and obey, you can remain in the joy of the Lord: "If you keep my commandments, you

will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:10-11 NIV).

Praise to the name of Jesus, who made a way for you to both enter into and remain in the joy of His presence and the presence of His joy!

## **You Are the Temple of the Holy Spirit**

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16 NIV).

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV).

Beginning with Pentecost in the New Testament, God's Holy Spirit took up residence in a new temple without walls—the hearts of Jesus' followers. Once again, it's not the externals of God's temple that matter, but to what extent the occupant of the house—the indwelling, almighty God—is put on display.

In the verses above, twice Paul teaches the Corinthian church that they are the temples of God. In each case, Paul is reminding them of their great privilege of being indwelt by the Spirit of God and of the accompanying high calling it entails. The Spirit of God is holy, and as a result, the church at Corinth, as well as you and me today, are called to lives that are pure and devoted to God.

When you were first saved and the Holy Spirit made your heart His permanent home, He didn't move into an immaculate residence. He moved in with the mandate from God to gently and intentionally begin a cleaning project that will last your entire lifetime. It's up to you as to when you are obedient to actively carry out the Holy Spirit's instructions. You get to choose when to start and how deep you're willing to clean. You can procrastinate, or you can quickly initiate changes to begin experiencing the joy and peace that accompanies the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Know for certain that, even when you are living in the flesh, the Holy Spirit is still living in you. And be encouraged that the entire time you are taking actions of obedience, Jesus is smiling. He is watching in delight as you are becoming the person He's always known you will be and as your heart continually becomes a more beautiful palace for the Holy Spirit to reside in.

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:11 NIV).

Today, God is still glorified when His temple is filled with the Holy Spirit, but now that temple is you! Every follower of Jesus is the temple of God and indwelt with the person of the Holy Spirit. It is God’s desire that you, your body, and your life put His glory on display. This is accomplished when you are filled with the Holy Spirit. As you abide in Jesus, God’s temple is being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit.

## **Pursue Holiness**

“Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 NASB).

Think about how, so many years ago, great men of God such as Moses, Solomon, and Ezekiel were overwhelmed by the glory of God filling the temple in the Old Testament. Isn’t it almost incomprehensible that as a follower of Jesus you have the same Holy Spirit residing in your heart? Isn’t it astounding you have access to the very same power every minute of every day through the indwelling Holy Spirit? What an immense gift the gracious God of the universe has given you as His child in the person of the Holy Spirit!

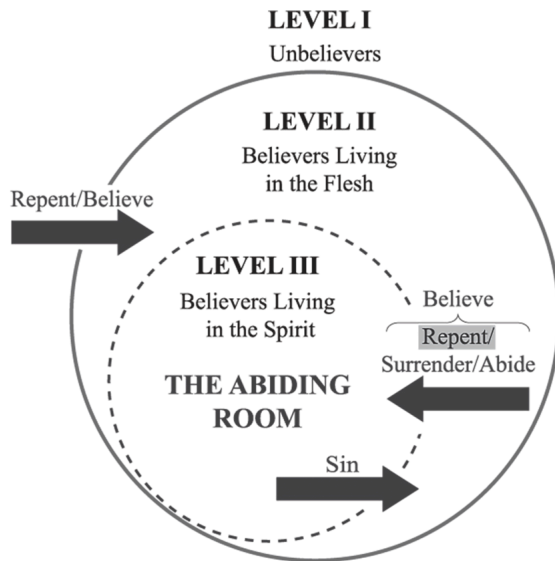
No one in this lifetime becomes and remains entirely holy, but God tells us to pursue holiness. Since God alone is holy, when we desire to be holy as God is holy, our only option is to pursue God Himself. This is a lifelong pursuit. But just as a loving, earthly father takes joy in running with his small child and letting himself be caught, so, too, does your heavenly Father. In His love and grace, when you wholeheartedly pursue Him, God takes joy in letting you “catch” Him—and then filling you with His Holy Spirit!

## **Repentance**

Now we will discuss repentance for followers of Jesus after salvation. Repentance relates to God’s holiness and your ongoing choice to live in the flesh or in the Spirit at any given moment.

“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4 NIV).

The word “Repent” is now shaded in the diagram:



What is repentance? Repentance means having a change of heart and mind that causes us to turn from going our own way and instead go God’s way. It means turning from our sin to God.

## Restoration Not Condemnation

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2 NIV).

While God’s unconditional love means we will never lose our relationship with Him, repentance brings us back into the fullness of that relationship. It’s part of God’s plan for our continual, full, relational restoration with Him. It does not lead to punishment or condemnation, but rather to restoration!

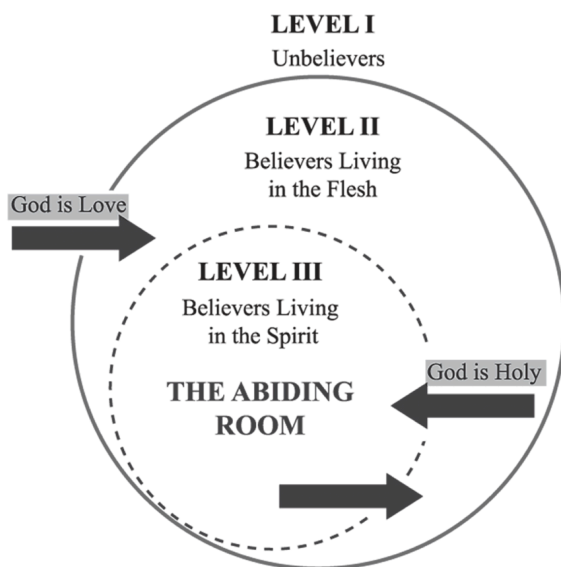
Repentance, like surrender, is another condition required for believers to experience the deeper, abiding fellowship with Jesus. Our sin is a barrier that keeps us from abiding. Repentance is the remedy to this barrier. Having repented of known sin, we can abide in Jesus and thus be filled with the Spirit.

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV).

As followers of Jesus, we need to continually renew our minds. Repentance is part of the transformational thinking that brings transformational living. God lovingly accepts our repentance when we acknowledge our sin. When sin is present, God is always eagerly awaiting our repentance. It is certain that when you repent, God will forgive you!

## God Is Holy

Let’s briefly review the diagram that shows God is both love and holy:



Once more, it is important to understand God is holy. And again, the word “holy” means set apart or sacred. God is without any trace of sin or evil.

As we learned, when Adam and Eve sinned, they could no longer live in the Garden of Eden. A barrier was placed between God and all humankind. Why? Because God is holy, and as a result, there were consequences for man’s sin.

Because God is holy and because you are His beloved child, He cannot be pleased when you sin. When we sin, it negatively impacts our relationship with Him. While God’s love is unconditional, His pleasure is conditional, because He is holy: “For I

am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy for I am holy ... For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44-45 NIV).

## **God’s Holiness Reveals Our Sin**

Isaiah 6 tells of the prophet Isaiah’s dramatic encounter with God’s holiness: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’” (Isaiah 6:1-3 NIV).

There is no hiding our sin from our all-knowing God. When we seek God, His character and His holiness are revealed to us. His holiness reveals to us any sin that is present. This is when we see ourselves as God sees us.

Isaiah experienced the conviction of sin in his encounter with God’s holy presence: “And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’” (Isaiah 6:4-5 NIV).

When the presence and work of the Holy Spirit convicts us of the presence of sin in our lives, our correct response is repentance. We repent because of who God is. He is holy. God desires the best for us, and that means He leads us to repentance.

Even in repentance, our depraved hearts will always fall short of God’s holiness. Thankfully, His grace bridges the gap from our repentance to His holy presence. Isaiah experienced this firsthand when God reached out and restored him: “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for’” (Isaiah 6:6-7 NIV).

## God’s Best for You Leads You to Repentance

“Your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:9-10 NIV).

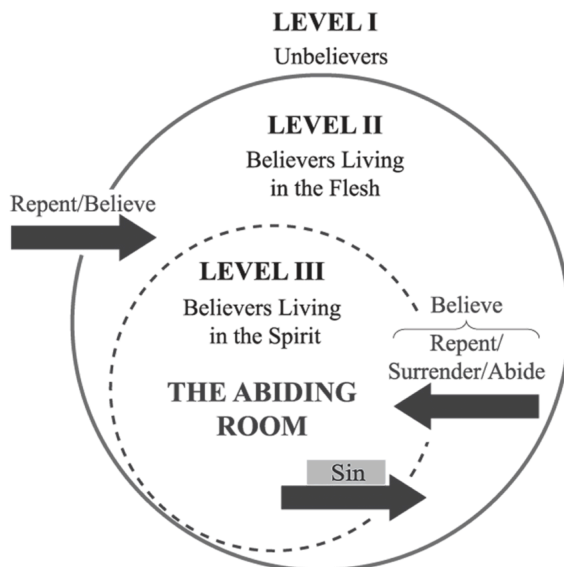
Note how this passage distinguishes godly sorrow from worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow does not lead to repentance. We can be sorry we got caught in sin or that we are experiencing the consequences of sin, without repenting.

Godly sorrow brings repentance, not merely regret. Godly sorrow leads us to genuine repentance not merely because it will relieve or reduce our pain but because we see our sin as God sees it. Godly sorrow produces a deep conviction and a sincere hatred toward sin because it is a detestable offense toward our Holy God.

## Disconnecting by Disobedience

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17 NIV).

In the next diagram, the word “Sin” is highlighted on the out arrow:



Sin impacts our abiding relationship with God. When you sin, God still loves you because He is love, and you are His beloved child. But God cannot be pleased with your sin because He is holy. When you receive instruction from the Lord through His Word or His Spirit's promptings, and you know what to do but choose to disobey, that is sin. A stubborn refusal to repent leads to the loss of the fullness of the blessing of abiding in Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

“Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning” (1 John 3:4-6 NIV).

As we saw earlier, sin grieves the person of the Holy Spirit and quenches His power, as described in Ephesians 4:30 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19. And though the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you forever, sin creates uncleanness that diminishes the fullness of your intimacy with Jesus.

There's more at stake than simply whether or not you will repent. It's a choice of whether or not you will abide in Jesus and be filled with the Spirit. All the wonderful blessings of the abiding, Spirit-filled life we have examined in previous chapters are available when we acknowledge our sin and repent. The decision to repent carries with it the choice to either be part of the minority who generally reside within the Abiding Room or among the majority of Christians living primarily outside of the Abiding Room.

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14 NIV).

Stated in absolute terms, if you won't repent, it displeases God. If you refuse to repent, you cannot expect to fully abide and thus be filled with the Holy Spirit. Our refusal to repent is a personal choice to not be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's a choice to live a Level II life rather than experience the full abundance of a harmonious relationship with God in Level III, Spirit-filled living. Yes, God's love, mercy, and grace remain, but so does His holiness.

Is it worth the loss of God's full favor and blessing to stubbornly refuse to repent of known sin?

## **The “Continual” Way of Living**

Just as with any other relationship, our relationship with Jesus is constantly changing. In John 15:5, when Jesus said, “Abide in me,” He was in essence saying, “Remain in continual fellowship with me.” Ephesians 5:18 essentially says, “being continually filled with the Spirit.” Similarly, Colossians 2:6 says, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him” (NIV).

This principle of continuity applies to repentance as well. Walking in the Spirit is a life of ongoing repentance. Repentance is not only how you were saved initially; it’s also how you are renewed continually.

As he prepared the way for Jesus’ ministry, John the Baptist said, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8 NIV). You began your walk with Jesus by repenting. The good work God started in you carries on within you as His grace continues to lead you to repentance.

In his book, *Repentance, The First Word of the Gospel*, Richard Owen Roberts says, “When a Christian grows careless about repentance, sin and self begin to crowd back into the life, and moral and spiritual decline set in as God demonstrates His displeasure by withdrawing more and more of His manifest presence. When true repentance occurs, a moral and spiritual recovery is made as God returns in refreshing power. If one lives in perpetual repentance as one ought, neither the decline nor the renewal occurs, but rather a steady upward movement is discernable. But alas, few live in consistent repentance, and thus an erratic lifestyle characterizes most professed Christians.”

## **Confession and Repentance Together**

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9 NIV).

Confessing means agreeing with God about your sin. Confession precedes repentance. It’s easy to get caught up in the cycle of “sin, confess, sin, confess” but never come to repentance. If you keep repeating the same sins in your life, perhaps it’s because you’re going the same way and haven’t turned around. It’s quite possible to agree with God that you’re going the wrong way (confession) without turning around (repentance).

To experience the abiding, Spirit-filled life, when you sin, the only thing that will get you going back in God's direction is the life-changing, heartfelt turnaround of repentance. When the Holy Spirit reveals your sin, you need to agree with God that what He says is true, and turn back to Him by repenting.

## **Jesus Welcomes Repentance**

Jesus is always giving you an open invitation to repent when sin is present so you can experience the fullness of His presence and blessings. It is His desire for you to become more like Him, so He gave you the Holy Spirit to reveal your sin so you will turn from it.

Let's look back at the Last Supper when Jesus was with His disciples and described the abiding relationship. First, He described the people in the relationship—the Father as the Vinedresser, Jesus as the true Vine, and His followers as the branches. Then He told the disciples they were already clean. Next, He said, "Abide in me," and began describing the blessings of bearing much fruit, answered prayer, etc., that flow from the abiding relationship with Him. The disciples were attentive listeners and learners as Jesus spoke.

What if instead of being submissive, obedient, teachable, and attentive, the disciples were constantly debating Jesus on what He was teaching them? What if each time He taught them something, they were saying things such as, "No, I disagree. I think you're wrong. Here's what I think"? Do you think Jesus, the Son of God, would have ignored their resistance and continued to share with them the intimacy of the abiding life if they were exhibiting those types of attitudes toward His teaching?

Or, what if while Jesus was speaking, they were all sitting around the table looking at pornographic drawings? What if they were sexually involved with women who weren't their wives? Do you think Jesus would have ignored these sinful behaviors? It's more likely He would have spoken to them as He often spoke to the crowds following Him—speaking direct truths so they might understand and make important adjustments in their lives. It's much more likely He would have dealt with their sin before He invited them to abide in Him.

Rest assured that when you mess up, Jesus is never looking to harshly say "Gotcha!" Far from it. Instead, He is always there to catch you and gently say "Don't worry. I gotcha." He stands there with open arms, ready to embrace you with His love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

## **The Restoration of Joy Arising from Repentance**

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (Psalm 51:12 NIV).

Can you wholeheartedly say you’re experiencing the joy of the Lord? The beginning of the restoration of the joy of your salvation, as King David asked for in Psalm 51, is one U-turn away. Repentance triggers an outpouring of God’s grace and mercy that brings the joy of the restoration of a right relationship with God.

It is worth noting that while repentance is turning to go in the right direction, typically it won’t immediately bring you to your destination. Any journey begins by taking a first step in the right direction, and you will need others to accompany and help you.

Long-term ingrained sin patterns and addictions take time to overcome. You may need to talk to a pastor, seek counseling, or enroll in a program specifically designed to assist you in your commitment to change.

As you consider the truths of repentance, which can be an uncomfortable process, don’t get discouraged. Don’t stop! Keep going—this is the process that leads to blessing! This leads to God’s best for you and all that He has in store for you.

God’s Word reminds you of this: “God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:10-11 NIV).

“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17 NIV).

## **Search Me, O God**

Do you long to have the blessings of intimacy with Jesus poured out on you richly as the previous verses remind us? Do you long for the regeneration and daily renewal of the fullness of the Holy Spirit? The awareness of any sin in your life is merely a short prayer away. It simply involves asking your merciful heavenly Father to search your heart and open your eyes, mind, and heart to any sin that exists.

Meditate and pray Psalm 139:23–24 below with sincerity right now. Go before God and genuinely ask Him to search your heart: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24 NIV).

God sees your heart as clearly as you see the words on this page. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you at this moment? Did He bring to mind something you need to do? Did He bring to mind someone you need to go to?

Right now, you might be squirming as you think about what it might cost you to fully follow Jesus and repent of your sin. If I were sitting across from you, I’d do everything to keep you from squirming out of this. There’s too much at stake. You have too much to gain! Don’t let your pride stand in the way of you making a spiritual U-turn. Take action.

Turn around now so you are heading in the right direction. Repentance restores, refreshes, and revives.

Listen to what God is saying to you and obey. The rewards await! “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24–25 NIV).

**ABIDING TRUTH:** Because God is holy, to experience the fullest blessings of the Spirit-filled life, repent of all known sin.

## **Forgiveness**

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:30–32 NIV).

Perhaps you’ve had the experience of receiving a notice of a gathering, reunion, wedding, or some other event you would like to attend, but your mind quickly jumped to the thought, “Oh no! THAT PERSON who did THAT THING to me will be there!” Instead of being excited about attending the event and seeing family and friends, you begin fretting about having to be in the same room with THAT PERSON. Have you ever felt like that? I know I have.

## **We Are Commanded to Forgive**

We have looked at many aspects of how we can experience the abiding, Spirit-filled life. Now let's look at an important, common hindrance to experiencing the fullest blessings of Level III living—unforgiveness. It falls within the category of repentance, but it's addressed separately and saved for last because it merits special attention.

Jesus commands us to forgive each other. In Matthew 6:14-15, he said,

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (NIV).

Unforgiveness is a difficult issue that comes in many forms and often lingers for years. It digs deep into our hearts and is tough to get out permanently, often reappearing suddenly as a major barrier to Spirit-filled living. Is anyone immune to its impact?

We have all had people do things to us that hurt deeply. Perhaps you've had some things done to you that are horrendous. But the Word of God is consistent—the path to freedom and the overflowing blessing of Jesus is forgiveness in your heart.

Ephesians 4:30-32 at the beginning of the chapter shows us the connection between unforgiveness and grieving the Holy Spirit. When we have unforgiveness in our hearts, it grieves the person of the Holy Spirit. When in our flesh we choose to not forgive, we are also choosing to forfeit the fullness of the blessings of abiding in Jesus. The lack of love in our hearts brings with it a loss of joy and peace not just toward the unforgiven person, but across our entire lives.

Jesus instructs us to love each other as He loves us. Therefore, if we choose not to forgive another person, it is direct disobedience to His command. Even partial disobedience is disobedience, and disobedience is sin. As we've seen, going all the way back to Adam in the garden of Eden, sin separates us from the abiding relationship with God. It was that way in the garden, and it is that way today.

Experiencing the fullest measure of fruit bearing Jesus described when we are abiding in Him is negated when the poison of unforgiveness resides in us. God, however, will bless your obedience to repent of unforgiveness with the power to live in freedom that cannot be experienced otherwise.

Forgiveness, then, is the obedience that comes about after we confess (agree with God about our sin) and repent (turn from our sin to God). Obedience to forgive others can take us from Level II to Level III living. Be assured, God still loves you unconditionally and can choose to bless you even if you don't forgive. It's not that God will abandon you if you are unrepentant, but He longs to pour out even greater blessings to those whose hearts have been made clean by repenting of their unforgiveness.

## **Unforgiveness in Our Lives**

The reasons for unforgiveness are extensive and may include when someone:

- ignored you
- continually disappointed you
- continually criticized you
- snubbed you
- failed to appreciate your efforts
- claimed your work as theirs
- cheated you
- excluded you from their group
- used you and then dumped you
- fired you
- lied to you or about you
- gossiped about you
- harmed you financially
- harmed you verbally
- harmed you physically
- harmed you sexually

Of course, this is not a complete list. Someone may have done some other awful thing to you. But whatever the offense, our unforgiveness can often reveal itself in a desire to see the offender punished. We may fear they'll get away with it and even think of ways to get even with them. This may manifest itself in actions such as ignoring them, being rude to them, telling others about their offenses, or other forms of revenge.

God, however, is clear that He is in charge of repaying them for their sin:

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21).

Doesn't knowing that God is aware of their sin, of how it hurt you, and that He promises to deal with them in His way and timing give you greater freedom to forgive them?

It's possible THAT PERSON may be unaware they've harmed you. You may have even discussed the situation with them, and they downplayed or refused to acknowledge their offense. But your forgiveness cannot be dependent upon their viewpoint and actions, because those are out of your control. What is within your control is your ability to choose to give up your devotion to your unforgiveness and allow the Spirit of God to empower you to forgive them.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting what was done to you. It doesn't necessarily result in reconciliation. It may or may not result in trust being restored in the person who harmed you. It is possible to forgive and still wrestle with the emotions of having been hurt. The process of forgiving may very naturally lead to feelings of anger, mourning, and sorrow.

Jesus understands the heartache you feel from the wrongs done to you. While Jesus forgave everyone who sinned against Him, He still felt pain as a result of the hurtful actions of others:

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

God recognizes you will feel pain from the unkind or hostile actions of others and is always available to let you unload your burdens on Him. He promises to be with you and comfort you in the midst of your pain:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Again, it's possible—and reasonable—to mourn, grieve, and feel anger as you process your unforgiveness. Ultimately, what you choose to do with those emotions is what matters to God.

In the never-ending spiritual battle going on in your heart between your flesh and the Holy Spirit, your flesh may continue to remind you of the unjust actions of THAT PERSON. Do not be discouraged—this is a battle you can win by the power of the Spirit within you.

The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent as a Counselor to indwell your heart, continues His work to bring you to full spiritual maturity as you become more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit will minister to you as you take steps to forgive. He will guide you in the same way as Jesus always has—in love. Freedom from the burden of unforgiveness is available to you if you choose to be obedient to His leading.

## **Love and Forgiveness Go Together**

On His last night before the cross, as He introduced and connected the abiding life with the upcoming arrival of the Holy Spirit, Jesus also tied love and obedience together. Jesus knew unforgiveness would be a problem. And He knew we can't be both unforgiving and loving toward someone at the same time. So just before He began laying out the abiding, Spirit-filled life at the Last Supper in John 14-16, He spoke about loving each other:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35 NIV).

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:10-12).

Jesus connected abiding in Him with loving others. He didn't say, “Love and forgive if ...” or “Love and forgive except ...” or “Love and forgive when ...” Jesus never said to love and forgive others if they acknowledge they are wrong, or if they say they are sorry, or if they make things right. He simply said, “Love one another.”

Love and unforgiveness cannot co-exist. If we won't forgive someone, we're unable to love them as Jesus loves us. When we choose to not forgive, we're also choosing to disobey Jesus' instructions regarding loving others. He said:

“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21).

Without question, forgiving others is easier said than done. You may need to talk to a pastor or leader in your church, a good friend, or a biblical counselor. It may be a process that takes weeks, months, or years. It may pop up again in your heart and need to be revisited. But regardless of the challenges, pursue whatever actions are necessary to rid yourself of unforgiveness.

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled” (Hebrews 12:14-15).

## **The Blessing of Forgiveness**

Is it possible your unforgiveness is robbing you of the joy and peace of Jesus?

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, “You will become free”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’” (John 8:31-36).

Jesus' heartfelt desire is for you to have the full measure of His joy flowing through you. He longs for you to experience an abundance of His presence. But consistently experiencing the fullness of the blessing of the abiding, Spirit-filled life is conditioned upon repenting of the sin of unforgiveness.

Think of the relief it will be to let go of your grudge toward THAT PERSON. You'll be freed up in your mind and your heart to fully enjoy resting in the presence of your friend, Jesus. Think of the contentment you will have, knowing you have been

obedient and are no longer bound by the grip of unforgiveness. Rather than repeatedly replaying the offense in your mind, you will be free to embrace this peaceful, life-changing, biblical thinking. Think of the peace you will experience when you choose love over bitterness.

While Jesus was on the cross being crucified despite being sinless, He looked on the men crucifying Him and said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34 NIV). The same power and grace that Jesus had to forgive them (and to forgive us), He will give you to help you forgive your offender. Why settle for a few drops of God’s blessing and mercy when you are promised an outpouring of God’s blessing if you’re obedient to forgive?

## **Don’t Wait to Forgive**

How many hours, days, or even years have you wasted agonizing over your initial hurt and bitterness toward THAT PERSON or THOSE PEOPLE? Aren’t you tired of lugging your unforgiveness with you everywhere you go?

Imagine how much more God would do through your life if you were released from those thoughts and filled with His peace and the power of the Holy Spirit instead. Again, it may require you going to a pastor or counselor for guidance and help, meeting with the other person, perhaps apologizing and asking for forgiveness for your actions, or other steps. But whatever steps are needed, don’t wait.

All the promises of blessings of Level III living will be yours when you forgive. Don’t wait another minute to get started. Go to Jesus now and ask Him to give you the strength to forgive. Jesus will accompany and guide you through it, and it will change your life in ways you never imagined.

Dear friend, my hope for you is that you will experience freedom from unforgiveness as expressed in the apostle Paul’s words to the believers in the Corinthian church:

“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm,

what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged” (2 Corinthians 7:8-13 NIV).

**ABIDING TRUTH:** Because God is holy, to experience the fullest blessings of the abiding, Spirit-filled life, forgive THAT PERSON who did THAT THING to you.

## **Reflection Question**

What are some ways you could pursue the holiness God asks for? How are repentance and forgiveness related to holiness?

Write down your answer to the box below (“Your Response or Question”) and send it to us. It will appear in Messages.