

Be a Berean!

The Bereans...received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day (Acts 17:11).

We know Jesus through the Bible, or we know him not at all. That is the urgent premise behind LAC's efforts to encourage personal Bible reading and systematic Bible study. We fervently hope that you will--

1. "Stand in the Rain" with us every day as we read through the Bible in three short years. Just go to

lockportalliance.blogspot.com

2. Attend one of these Bible-based classes this week—

"Study of Major Bible Themes"--Sunday at 9:45

"Value-Packed Parenting: Raising Rock-Solid Kids in a Pleasure-Driven World"--Sunday at 9:45

"Experiencing God's Dream for Your Marriage"--Sunday at 9:45

(Contact Franklyn Pfeil--pfeilmail@yahoo.com--with questions or comments.)

"be holy: make a fist, and fight"

I inherited my suspicion of doctors and hospitals from my mother. When she retired, she was head nurse at Lockport Memorial Hospital. She knew the good, the bad, and the indifferent. She inculcated our family with a healthy skepticism towards medical institutions.

I also inherited her high blood pressure.

I know I did, because she warned us to watch out for it. So when I worked as a teacher, every year I'd ask the school nurse to take a reading. Later on, when I worked as a social worker, I'd go to the public health nurse and get my once-a-year blood pressure check.

Those yearly moments were the only "doctor's appointments" I made for nearly thirty years. Over that time I watched my blood pressure slowly rise into the danger zone.

Shelley, who runs the universe whenever Jesus is on vacation, put her foot down the other day and told me that I'm going to the doctor and I'm going to take medicine if the doctor says so.

All of this talk of checkups got me wondering why we don't get a spiritual checkup every year like many of us get (or should get!) a medical checkup.

When was the last time you had a spiritual checkup? What would such a checkup even look like?

There's a word in the Bible which is an overall measure of spiritual health. The word is "holy."

It is the Bible's most all-encompassing description of God's nature. God is not only holy, he is "*Holy, holy, holy*" (1)--which is exponential holiness, raised to the nth power.

But God doesn't reserve the word for just himself. Listen to this: "*Be holy, because I am holy.*" (2)

What does that mean?

First, here's what it does not mean: the cartoon image of the man atop a mountain thinking deep thoughts is about as far from the biblical definition of holy as one can get. Because the word *holy* is a call to action. It implies that something or someone is ***set apart to serve***. The man on the mountain is just *apart*. He isn't *serv*ing. And he wasn't even *set* there. God doesn't set anybody on a mountain to serve.

"*Be holy, because I am holy*" can sound intimidating, unattainable. But God doesn't set the unattainable before us. Here's the same command, expressed in terms we can grasp:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. (3)

And here's a picture of the one we're trying to imitate:

Let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (4)

Holiness, the all-encompassing word for the nature and character of God, is meant to be an all-encompassing word for us as well. It's meant to be **an indicator of our overall spiritual condition.**

What spiritual shape are you in to run the race, to join the battle set before you? That is how holy you are.

Let's go back to the man on the mountain. He probably prays. (What else is there to do up there all day?) He probably is strong in scripture study, at least in an academic sense. But he's not in the race. He's not using the gifts God gave to serve and strengthen others. He might love God up there, but he isn't loving his neighbor as himself. (Primarily due to the fact that he has no neighbors!)

He is in poor spiritual shape. He's nowhere close to holy.

Every now and then, I urge the Bible classes I teach to utilize a device--a handy holiness barometer--which can help us make an effective spiritual checkup. This device, if you were to hold up your hand, is right in front of your face!

So open your best hand, palm up:

- If you are in a whole-Bible study program (like Stand in the Rain) then curl your index finger toward your open palm.
- If you take time each day to pray, curl your next finger toward your palm.
- If you serve others, using the gift God gave you (teaching, compassion, music, administration, helpfulness, you name it...) then curl your third finger inward.
- If you give to the local church your cold hard ca\$h--to some sacrificial degree--then curl your little finger inward.
- And if you *love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself* (5); then bring your thumb down over your clenched fingers. (Notice that this one covers all the others, just as Jesus said it does.)

If you can clench each finger and cover them with your thumb, you are in good spiritual shape. Now you are ready to fight, to race, to endure, to win.

Holiness is about the daily disciplines of spiritual training. It is more about dirt, sweat, and deprivation than it is about thinking fond thoughts in the rarefied air.

Holiness is about joining the battle, and fighting to win. Even when--especially when--the victory is achieved at great cost.

So go, be holy: make a fist, and fight.

(1) Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; (2) Leviticus 11:45; 1 Peter 1:16; (3) Ephesians 5:1 (4) Hebrews 12:1-2; (5) Matthew 22:36-40