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## ***Reach for Holiness Before Happiness***

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

HOLINESS IS A HIGHER PRIORITY THAN HAPPINESS. It should rank higher in our scale of values than happiness, and maintaining its presence in our lives should be a matter of more pressing concern. The pursuit of holiness should be what we’re known for.

To say that anything is more important than happiness sounds absurd to our modern ears, of course. The very idea flies in the face of popular philosophy. Even when it comes to religious philosophy, most people nowadays take it as their basic premise that God “wants us to be happy.” We even use that benchmark to decide what God’s will is in the first place. Faced with various interpretations of scriptural teaching, we choose the one that we think would make us the happiest. And if someone challenges the correctness of our decision, our reply is often predictable: “Well, I just can’t believe that God wouldn’t want me to be happy.”

But while the “pursuit of happiness” may be a social and political priority, it does not rank at the top of any scriptural list of criteria by which our conduct is to be decided. Although long-term joy, properly defined, was His objective (Hebrews 12:1-2), Jesus often chose the difficult over the easy, and the painful over the pleasant: “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

None of this is meant to imply that happiness is unimportant. It certainly is important, to some extent. But to whatever extent happiness matters, the way to achieve it is not to make it the main objective in life, as many people do. Happiness comes mostly to those who are willing to be unhappy, if need be, while they work on goals of greater significance. God, our Creator, is a better manager of our happiness than we are, and in the long run, we’ll be happier if we seek Him first and let Him decide how much happiness we can handle without forgetting Him. If we had to, we could survive the loss of any amount of happiness, but no one can survive the absence of holiness. So that’s the thing most worth pursuing . . . and if we don’t do that, then death will be our doom.

“No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he shall be” (A. W. Tozer).