

A DIALOGICAL RESOURCE FOR NAZARENE CLERGY

USA/CANADA REGION, CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

Grace & Peace

Ministry in a Connected Culture

GRACEANDPEACEMAGAZINE.ORG



A DECADE OF
FAITHFULNESS



Embracing and Practicing Holiness:

AN INTERVIEW WITH T. SCOTT DANIELS

The doctrine of holiness is central to our beliefs as Nazarenes. But what role do spiritual practices have in our becoming holy? Where do we need to enlarge our understanding of holiness? Grace & Peace asked Scott Daniels, who serves as lead pastor of Nampa (Idaho) College Church of the Nazarene, to discuss these and other questions.

G&P: What have you learned about the importance of spiritual disciplines as you've sought to live a life of holiness?

DANIELS: Like many people in the Holiness tradition, I was raised looking for a particular experience—a moment of surrendering everything I am to Christ, inviting Him to cleanse me of my sins. The experience of commitment made a significant difference in my life, and being filled with the Spirit was crucial. However, the development of a life of holiness is more than just making some decisions; it is more than just sort of gritting my teeth and saying, “Holy Spirit, help me do better this time.”

As I sought to live out that commitment, I realized that I am who I am because I've practiced holiness. When Paul writes in Romans that we should give our bodies as living sacrifices, he's essentially saying, “Listen, when we were slaves to sin, it was like we woke up every morning and said, ‘Hey, Sin, here are our bodies. Do with them what you want.’” We practiced being sinners. We did things that engrained practices of sin deep into who we are. I think the Holiness tradition at times has said that all these sinful practices we've built up in ourselves can simply be eradicated without effort.

Paul also says we are no longer slaves to that. So now we should “present”—and I even love the verb there in Romans—we should “present and keep on presenting” the members of our bodies as instruments of righteousness. I know a lot of us—



not only in the Holiness tradition but also in broader Protestantism—have been suspicious of spiritual disciplines, some of the Christian practices of the church. But I'm convinced that we become who we are through practice—in a sense, from the ground up—through the things we do with our bodies. Practice shapes who we are. In the Holiness tradition, we've got to recover these disciplines: prayer, fasting, confession, participation in the sacraments, meeting together, works of service. These aspects of the disciplined life *become*—and I think the key word here is *become*—the means of grace that God uses to bring about His transformed work in our life.

I'm certainly not saying we can do away with what we used to call a crisis experience, that we can



do without making a decision to give all that we are to Christ. My wife and I will soon celebrate our 26th anniversary; on February 23, 1990, when we walked out of that sanctuary, we were married. We made a commitment to each other. We couldn't be more married than we were. But I have to tell you, over 25 years later, I am so much more married than I was in 1990. Part of being so much more married is that I've been practicing the married life and what it means to be committed to this one person—to live together, to eat together, to share life together, to have children together, to weep together, to laugh together, to do the routines of putting up Christmas decorations and taking them down together. The

practices of life together have formed in us the reality of the married life.

The same is true for holiness. We come to a place where we say we are fully God's, but that is just the beginning of this journey of learning all that it means to be fully God's, just the beginning of practicing it until it gets deep down into our bones and reverses the sinful habits that were formed in us before we committed our lives to God. Holiness takes practices. I like to put a set of parentheses around the "s" at the end: Holiness takes practice(s). God uses all sorts of means of grace to make us the people He wants us to be. Practice shapes who we are.

Where the Body of Christ goes, where the grace of Christ goes, transformation follows. Those practices of service and transformation as individuals and as communities are critical for our own lives as individuals and as the Church.

G&P: In what other ways do we need to enlarge our understanding of holiness?

DANIELS: We fail to embrace all of what holiness means when we think only in personal terms. Even when we think about the practices of holiness, we think of what we used to call piety—personal piety, devotional life, and prayer—things that are very much centered around the self. There isn't anything wrong with these things; we need to be healthy, holy people as individuals. However, as John Wesley would say, "There's no holiness but social holiness." The more I read the Scriptures, the more I'm convinced that God doesn't want just holy individuals. He wants a holy people—a people

like the nation of Israel, who learned God's life and became witnesses to God's life in the world. As a pastor, I've wondered a lot: What are the practices we do together that make us holy?

Some friends have helped me to rethink worship as not just something we show up to do because it's a habit. As we gather for worship—whatever day of the week that is—it is God calling us and drawing us close to Him, forming us by His Word and His presence, and sending us out, back into a life of service in the world.

Both of those things are important. First, our collective worship, our gathering close to each other and to the heart of God, is so critical in forming who we are, as well as those practices that are wrapped up in that—everything from the call to worship, to singing, to giving in the offering, to hearing the Word, to confessing, to gathering around the Lord's Table, to prayer. All of those things we do together—that communal part of worship—are central in forming who we are.

Second, then, is that we are sent back into the world to make a difference, to be instruments of God's salt and light in the world. We do these practices not because we're good people and good people do nice things but because we're the Body of Christ in the world. Where the Body of Christ goes, where the grace of Christ goes, transformation follows. Those practices of service and transformation as individuals and as communities are critical for our own lives as individuals and as the Church. This is one way God transforms the old creation into His new creation. &

T. SCOTT DANIELS earned his M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary, where he also received his PhD in Christian Ethics and Theology. Daniels has served as dean of the Azusa Pacific University School of Theology and now serves as lead pastor of Nampa College Church of the Nazarene. Scott is also the author of *Seven Deadly Spirits*, *The First 100 Days: A Pastor's Guide*, *Embracing Exile*, and the *New Beacon Bible Commentary John 13–21: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*.
