

*The Millennial generation is going
to rebel by behaving not worse, but better.*

—NEIL HOWE AND WILLIAM STRAUSS

Millennials Rising (written in 2000)

INTRODUCTION WHAT'S HOLINESS?

In April of 2009, *Newsweek* magazine ran a now-famous cover story titled “The Decline and Fall of Christian America.” The article offended those who don’t realize we live in a post-Christian society. It described a negative paradigm shift and raised uncomfortable questions about the impotence of Christian values to shape our culture. It also looked at ways Christians display their faith in American society.

American spirituality has ceased to be traditionally religious. Instead, American spirituality is focused on a traditional understanding of what being religious means—church attendance, reading of sacred texts, exclusive claims to God, etc. We are a spiritual society but not a decidedly Christian

society, despite an overwhelming majority of people claiming a Christian faith.

What's emerging instead of a traditional Christianity is what Gabe Lyons calls the "next Christians," a younger generation who engage in a post-Christian culture in a sincere effort to bring glory to God. Next Christians embody six differentiating values: provoked (not offended), creating (not critics), called (not employed), grounded (not distracted), community-focused (not alone), and countercultural (not "relevant").

While Lyons wouldn't put a specific age demographic on this youthful generation of Christians, I see these differentiating values being shown strongly among millennial Christians.¹ As a twenty-seven-year-old, much of what I share will be my perspective on my generation (the Millennial Generation is known as those born between the years 1980 and 2000) and our collective journey of faith together. Certainly, though, my thoughts are not limited to people in their teens through mid thirties.

In further describing these next Christians, Lyons also says,

When Christians incorporate these characteristics [the six differentiating values] throughout the fabric of their lives, a fresh, yet orthodox way of being Christian springs forth. The death of yesterday becomes the birth of a great tomorrow. The end of an era becomes a beautiful new beginning. In this way, the end of Christian America becomes good news for Christians.²

The shift in Christian America means the upcoming generations are developing a better understanding of

cultural engagement with their faith. However, among next Christians—and many older Christians as well—a relationship with God today is framed exclusively around beliefs that make little difference in the way we live. We should not pursue separating ourselves from the world any more than we should pursue synchronizing ourselves with the world around us. For next Christians, the pursuit of God as nothing more than simple beliefs held inside ourselves means we are a good reflection of the nation of Israel throughout the Old Testament, as they shared a covenant with God, but ignored Him in every other way possible. We've gone from a holy, set-apart people of God to a people with shared beliefs who live no differently than the culture around us.

The portrait of holiness created for Millennials has been a way to act in church and a list of dos and don'ts to live by outside of church. Growing up, holiness was not portrayed generally as something we became through sanctification. Instead, holiness connoted negativity. We were taught holiness is something we become by not dancing, drinking, having sex, or watching R-rated movies. If we could avoid those evil things, we would be holy. Right or wrong, these things became the representation of the devil's scheme to overtake conservative Christian culture. Rather than try to fit our lives within this list, we've simply abandoned the idea of holiness altogether.

Even the Merriam-Webster Dictionary understands the fundamental reality of holiness being a positive pursuit of someone rather than an abstaining from certain behaviors. It defines holy as “exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness,” or also as “having

a divine quality.”³ These definitions of “holy” paint a picture of holiness that most Christians fail to understand: Holiness is something of God (for example, He is worthy of complete devotion, He is divine), not something we gain through the way we live.

We must grasp holiness not as new behavior, activity, or disciplines. Holiness is new affections, new desires, and new motives that then lead to new behavior. If I don’t see my sin as completely forgiven, then my affections, desires, and motives will be wrong. I will just aim to prove myself. My focus will be the consequences of my sin rather than hating the sin and desiring God in its place.⁴ The beginning of my calling toward a holy life is the challenge of loving God more deeply. Holiness is not found in strict rule keeping alone; it is found in our desire of the Holy One. *Holiness is not new behaviors. Holiness is new affections.*

Growing up I always ate dinner from a portion or section plate. I had to keep my foods separate. My lettuce salad was ruined if the gravy crept onto the wrong part of the plate. Warm gravy on chilled lettuce wasn’t my ideal for a meal. Even though I don’t use a plate with sections anymore, I still hate to mix my foods. I’ve always thought that if the food were supposed to taste better mixed it would have come that way. I guess I’ve never grown out of this immature mindset since childhood. Over the years I lived out this same behavior as I was my devoted-follower-of-Jesus self sometimes, but I found ways to justify my choices to do what I wanted at other times.

Both of these examples demonstrate something we Millennials (me included) struggle with—an incessant desire

to compartmentalize our lives. Such sectioning of our lives is in total opposition to the holy God we desire to be living for.

The word *holy* is derived from an Old English word meaning *whole*, but the various areas of our lives are completely separate. When we're at church, we become our good Christian selves. When we're at school, we become our smart and intellectual selves. When it's the weekend, we become our fun-loving, have-a-good-time selves. And rarely do any of these personalities we've created ever cross paths.

Somehow we've bought the lie that if we are our good Christian selves enough of the time, God will have mercy on us and take us to heaven. He does love us with an unending grace, right? So we choose to stay as immature Christian believers who go to church to hear great music and be convicted by great teaching, and once we leave the church we'll enter into another one of our personalities and leave everything from church at church to pick it all up again a week later.

When our faith becomes nothing more than leaving our normal life to attend church to make sure we're good with God and forgiven of our sins, we've completely misunderstood our calling. We've bought into the lie of the total and complete Christian message being that we're sinners and God, through His great love, saved us. Christianity then becomes just something we accept, nothing else. It doesn't take much to simply believe in Jesus. In fact, that doesn't cost us anything. But following Jesus, that's another matter. There's no greater cost than following Jesus. Our holy God doesn't want one hour of our devotion on a Sunday. God wants our whole lives.



A year or two ago I spoke on the phone with my recently turned twenty-one-year-old friend, David (not his real name). He lived out of state at the time, and we started talking about his life, how the only thing he did on the weekends was party to the point of getting drunk. Knowing that I probably would disagree with that lifestyle, David told me, “It’s just drinking and having a good time. I’m twenty-one now, I want to enjoy my freedom. At least I don’t get drunk very often.”

This perfectly summarizes the mentality of so many in our culture today. We have three very easy ways to get ourselves off the hook when it comes to sinful actions and behavior. First, we claim God’s forgiveness before, during, and after our sinful behavior so the sin doesn’t really matter. He’s forgiven the sin and His grace abounds, so we sense no reason to avoid it. Second, we sin the same way often enough that we forget it’s sin. Once we get over this barrier of our conscience recognizing sin, we’re home free because sin is no longer a burden that weighs us down. Once we make it a habit to get drunk, the guilty feeling we get during our hangover goes away. Third, we emphasize the importance of freedom in our Christian faith. This freedom is what allows us to do things we know God would not approve of because He wouldn’t want us to be legalistic. The problem with justifying ourselves like this is we tend to look at sin as a neutral object, something not for us or against us, just a reality in life.

I don’t write any of this as someone above these behaviors. The truth is none of us is beyond the powerful weapon of sin that tries to take control of us in ways we rarely recognize.

First John 1 paints a picture of how we should view sin, as it describes the difference between darkness and light. Verse 7 speaks to the importance of us “walking in the light,” which is ultimately the opposite of the sin-filled lives we often live. Sin desires to turn us into self-righteous people (those who “claim to have fellowship with him,” v. 6) who deceive ourselves into thinking we are above sin (“we claim to be without sin,” v. 8), until that sin takes us into bondage (“we claim we have not sinned,” v. 10). Sin is a distortion of the holiness God desires in us. We’ll dive into what sin is and how it affects us later in the book, but for now we can view the darkness in our lives as the sin that’s trying to take us into bondage. We need the light of Christ to shine deep into those places.



The Bible lays out holiness for us in a specific command: “Be holy, for I am holy.” This is God speaking to us in Leviticus 11, 19, and in 1 Peter 1. This statement is repeated several times throughout the Bible, and that should give us pause. The Bible repeats statements such as this for one reason only: it’s important. But there’s one major problem to this. We aren’t listening. God gives us a lot of commands within His Word and we’re not especially adept at following most of them. If we’re honest, how many of us do a great job of loving our neighbor as much as we love ourselves? For whatever reason, God giving us a command is not enough for us to see the value or the importance of it. We need more. We want an obvious benefit or the promise of easier lives before we’ll truly buy into what God says is important for us.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was set apart to

be God's chosen people through circumcision. Today, God's followers show themselves to be His by their holiness. A bold statement, to be sure, and a false statement if we choose to believe holiness to be something we get by showing up at church or by not committing the "big" sins. Many previous generations of Christians have misunderstood holiness and provided a framework for us that we've rejected. Holiness can't be ignored, though, because God can't be ignored. In his classic work *The Holiness of God*, R. C. Sproul says, "We must seek to understand what the holy is. We dare not seek to avoid it. There can be no worship, no spiritual growth, no

GOD IS CALLING US TO A
BETTER WAY. WILL WE
REFLECT THE WORLD
AROUND US OR
THE GOD INSIDE US?

true obedience without it. It defines our goal as Christians."⁵ Holiness in the whole sense (pun intended) of the word means a life focused around God both internally and externally.

Next Christians show their lack of holiness by accepting sin as a way of life instead of an evil to overcome. Peter explains that our way to holiness and our ability to overcome sin is through the ransom provided by Jesus' precious blood (1 Peter 1). Jesus provided the way to God, and it is His holiness, worked out in connection to the Father through the Spirit, that we need to filter into our hearts and lives. Why does holiness matter? The sin that so easily entangles us leads to our ultimate demise. Holiness leads to the ultimate and true life found in God. Holiness is the mark of God's grace at work in our lives through the sacrifice of Jesus.

What's at stake? Hebrews 12:14 says we are to strive for

holiness, for without it we won't see the Lord. This isn't a death threat of "do good works or go to hell," but it is most clearly a statement we must give an ear toward. It is not something we can simply avoid. Holiness is a mostly forgotten and unused word in our world today. It carries so much baggage through our misunderstanding and valuing external behaviors that it's easier for us to avoid it than to pursue it.

Yet God is calling for us to become more like Him, and He is calling us toward being a holy people, set apart for Him. God is calling us to a better way.

Will we reflect the world around us or the God inside us?

God's saving grace at work in our lives is not only a taste of the future glory we will experience with Him, but also of changes He can make in us now. He intends to take our lives and to slowly work out holiness in them. A status quo relationship with God is not His desire because, in dwelling within us, He desires to make us more like Himself through sanctification. He uses those who, like Isaiah (see chapter 1) and Ernest in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" (see addendum), recognize they are, in themselves, unable to model holy lives—yet can serve Him with holy lives because of their intimate focus on Him.

The collective journey of faith for Millennials has led down the treacherous road of sin, and it is apparent holiness has rarely been on our radar. We think of "holy people" as those with their lives put together in a nice, tidy way. With that picture in one hand and the picture of our messy, sinful lives in another, it's no surprise when we take holiness off our bucket list—things we want to do before we die.

Yet as we alternate in drawing near and falling away from God in a roller coaster of emotions, the Father extends His hand toward us, calling us on this journey of relationship with Him. He intends to make a masterpiece of our mess by shining His light into our darkness. This book looks at the darkness and how our Father brings the light. That is the essence of His holiness at work.

*No one loses their innocence.
It is either taken or given away willingly.*

—TIFFANY MADISON
Author, writer

1. INNOCENCE

I don't remember when, but at some point in middle or high school it became very clear that innocence wasn't cool. In order to be cool, boundaries had to be stretched and broken. Like playing quarters during lunch, or smoking after school, or sneaking over to a girl's house to spend the night with her.

Innocence wasn't just looked down upon at school, but also at church. As authenticity became a trendy goal for churches, the value of innocence decreased. The "Innocents" were the students who never skipped class, never cussed, never missed a Bible study, and certainly never stayed out late.

Most people today walk around wearing their "lack of innocence badge" with immense pride. Within the church itself, authenticity about our failings is now the highest prize

awarded for pastors or congregants—even if it means the pastor bleeds all over us. This lack of innocence means many have lived real life and they're better for it. After all, what would life be if we lived with a bunch of regrets?

Growing up, I looked differently at the Innocents in the youth group at my church. I figured it was only a matter of time before real life blindsided them and they were left scrambling for help. As I grew older, innocence was a social death sentence. People either wanted to take advantage of them or make fun of them. To most people, living the life of an Innocent appeared boring.

During this time, I was always looking for whatever way I could to lose some of my sheltered, growing-up-in-a-Christian-home innocence. I wanted no part of the innocence my parents and my church had pushed for. Certainly I wasn't trying to sin, but I was looking to test the boundary between sinning and losing my innocence. As the oldest child in a pastor's home, I soon realized many people had an expectation that I would be a rebel, like popular singers Toni Braxton or Katy Perry. (Both are pastors' kids.) Parents usually teach their kids to first obey the rules and then love God, but my parents instilled in me a desire for God, which resulted in me obeying some helpful but not overly strict rules. I had seen the innocent and rules-based lives many of my Christian friends were living, and I wanted no part of that. Later, though, I came to see losing so much of my innocence as a major regret.

Many years ago, I found myself making decisions in various relationships that were based more on physical affection than on healthy relational choices. In these relationships I preferred

to rely on physical intimacy rather than having to engage the holes in my life. What I wanted was to love and be loved, but in the process I never allowed God's love to be enough—I was greedy for more.

As the oldest kid of a senior pastor who had memorized all the right Bible verses, I knew I was crossing lines that were not supposed to be crossed when I decided to attend some parties despite knowing I was throwing myself into compromising situations. This conscious decision to begin partying began the slow fade of my life into sin. Soon enough I was comfortable drinking enough to become drunk. And the fade didn't stop with the drinking and the parties either. I quickly found myself losing control in physically intimate moments with women. Once the momentum of physical affection begins it's almost impossible to stop. And suddenly, my virginity, something I had previously cherished as highly as anything I owned, was gone. Just like that.

DURING THIS TIME,
I STRUGGLED WITH
KNOWING HOW TO
APPROACH GOD.

During this time, I struggled with knowing how to approach God. I felt immense guilt, and I had no idea who to trust with these parts of my life. Deep inside of me was a calloused heart, raw from my own self-inflicted wounds. Part of me wanted to feel emotion and let God into my pain, but I had convinced myself that a holy God would only judge me for my mistakes.

With no one to turn to and sensing I couldn't go to God, I waged a battle within myself to determine what direction my life was going and what needed to change. At times the

intensity of this battle was unbearable. I became quite skilled in hiding the shame, not letting anyone close enough to see the battle I was waging within myself. I had to choose whether to be vulnerable with God and those around me, or to continue down the path I had started.

Years later, telling my future wife, Rose, about my mistakes in relationships was the hardest conversation I've ever had. She had so much purity and innocence to bring to our relationship, and I felt I had come with nothing to offer but the baggage of poor decisions in my past. It's easy to lose innocence in order to gain life experience, but it's a painful process to look back at that loss, allowing God to heal as only He can.

IN A CHRISTIAN CULTURE
THAT DOES NOT VALUE
INNOCENCE, IT IS NO WONDER
OUR GENERATION IS OFTEN
INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE
CULTURE AROUND IT.

I often wondered how I, of all people, willfully walked into all these traps. I was the worship leader guy with a Christian education whose dad was a pastor. I've wondered whether innocence and purity are even attainable in our culture today. Our churches and pastors think we just need to preach on purity more often. Or maybe we just need to tell people how much God hates sin, and then they'll avoid it. I don't think those are the answers, or at least they did not work for me. What I didn't value enough was the gift of purity to God and to my future wife. What I didn't value enough was innocence.

In a Christian culture that does not value innocence, it is no wonder our generation is often indistinguishable from the culture around it. We've simply been taught by our culture that

life experience is the most valuable thing a person can have.

When we first met, my friends thought of Rose (my future wife) as a good woman to marry, but not a fun woman to date. She had a reputation for being an innocent girl and when we first started dating I found out she had never kissed a guy. Imagine my fear of whether she would want to stick with me because of my past. For instance, on the wall of my Christian college dorm room, my roommates created a list of all the different girls I had pursued over the period of a few months. They called it “The Braun List.” There was a different girl listed for every week! Rose had her own emotional baggage from previous guys, but I was dragging a lot more weight than she was and it was obvious as we first started dating.

I second-guessed myself and constantly worried about whether my past was enough to push her away from me. One of the greatest gifts Rose gave me was her innocence. Her innocence was a constant, harsh reminder of all I had given up in order to lose mine.

Dating and marrying Rose showed me the other side of pursuing a life of innocence and the benefits definitely outweighed the supposed lack of life experience. Rose had a love for God that allowed her to worship Him freely, to pray with anticipation, and to love others without holding back.



The innocence I lost through life began to spill over in how I related with God and I began to approach God with an expectation that He would let me down. I had convinced myself that a holy God would be unwilling to have His best in mind for a person who walked down unholy paths. My sin

slowly convinced me that God could be holding out on me. Deep down, I believed God couldn't love me or be pleased with me. Whatever bright-colored glasses I saw the world through before had been replaced with a deep-gray filter. The age-old question of "how can a loving God cause so much pain?" has been felt and lived through my innocence lost. The combination of sinful behavior, and seeing God put me in seemingly impossible circumstances, convinced me for a time that God could not truly have my best in mind, and He certainly couldn't love me. I wouldn't deserve His love and He's proven He doesn't give His best to people like me.

As a kid, I enjoyed watching the TV show *Boy Meets World*. The main character in the show, Cory Matthews, had a best friend (Shawn) who grew up on what viewers always sensed as the other side of the train tracks. Shawn never had much; his mom left home when he was young and his dad had little involvement in his life. Being at Cory's house gave Shawn a nice break from the tough circumstances he was growing up in. Shawn was the kid who hardly paid attention in class, had a different fling with a girl on each episode, and had the mentality of every rule needing to be broken. No question, innocence was not something the writers of the show valued in the character of Shawn (though he was never shown as sexually involved). As Shawn grew older, he had a difficult time maintaining relationships with girls. His insecurity, lack of commitment, and no-regrets mentality meant Shawn walked away from relationships when they got difficult. He pushed girls away by his constant wavering in whether the relationship was worth the effort.

The lack of innocence in Shawn led him down a destructive

path that culminated in a scene when his dad left town and Shawn began a conversation with God out of desperation:

Don't blow me off, God. I never asked you for anything before and I never wanted to come to you like this, but don't take Turner [his teacher] away from me; he's not done yelling at me yet. God, you're not talking but I know you're here, so I'm gonna talk, and you can listen. . . . God, I don't wanna be empty inside anymore.¹

Shawn saw no value in innocence when he had it, and never realized what he gave up by losing it. The emptiness he felt inside and the question he had of whether God was truly listening to him or loving him came through the letdown of losing his innocence.

In many ways, I was like Shawn as I related to God. Deep down I was extremely insecure and viewed my life's experiences as the prime reason for why I wasn't close to God. I figured *He's the one who has let me down. He's the one who has acted as if He was never listening.* It was a lot easier to place the blame for my problems on God than myself. He was the one who didn't show up in my time of greatest need.

Rarely do we take the time to think through the repercussions of our actions. In losing innocence, I gained life experience, an awesome "lack-of-innocence badge," possibly even a better understanding of how to handle difficult circumstances, but I never considered all I had given up in the process.

Those of us with an innocence lost "know" that God rarely answers our prayers on our time. We "know" God can't solve the problems we face or the past hurts we have. Our innocence

lost forces us to ignore the voice telling us we can come to God with our loss and pain. We're too hurt to let His love in.



I regularly endured the questions of whether I was going to become a pastor like my dad. I always answered with an emphatic "No!" because that was his life, not mine. College was my first opportunity to decide whether I wanted to go to church or if I even wanted to open my Bible or pray. In high school I had my parents and my youth pastor encouraging me weekly and sometimes daily to make it a priority. I had every intention of becoming more like Christ while at college, but ultimately I went the other direction. I finally had the freedom to do whatever I wanted to do. On the road of life, I now had the opportunity to run the roads how I wanted to, but the decisions I made put me down a path in my life where I no longer liked myself.

In pursuit of sin I had lost my innocence, my hope, and my relationship with God. I needed a new direction, but felt too lost to find my way.

FOR SAUL AND ME, THE
"DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL"
DESCRIBES A DIFFICULT
JOURNEY FROM SIN AND
TOWARD UNION WITH GOD.

So one night I decided to go for a run and took off toward the outskirts of the small town where I lived. I needed to get away and to clear my head. I preferred to run without music and lose myself in the empty space of the dark night. It gave me that freeing feeling that no one could see me, that I was all alone. I needed the empty road and the blackness to think and to feel, to seek God and to figure out whether I had messed up everything that I

called my life. I ran to the town's edge, wrapped inside the fog and mist, the flicker of city lights in the distance.

When I passed the grass fields and empty plots of farmland ready to be planted for the coming summer, I had a sense of God being near. No, I didn't hear an audible voice from heaven, but I sensed a glimpse of light out of the darkness of my life. I continued these runs out of a desperate need to hear from God. And I continued to listen.

A couple thousand years ago, a man named Saul, a well-respected Jewish leader, gained permission to travel to Damascus to hunt down the Christ followers. But as he made his way along the road he encountered Jesus and fell to the ground blind. He stayed blind for three days, inside a darkness, neither eating nor drinking, until Ananias came to him with instructions from God. Saint John of the Cross expressed a similar time in his life as the "dark night of the soul." For him and for Saul and for me, this darkness describes a difficult journey *from* sin and *toward* union with God. I needed to spend time in this darkness and allow God to work through my broken life because I couldn't begin to rebuild the pieces until I knew how far I'd walked into my sinful patterns.

I recognized this massive gap between God's holiness and my life. I had a newfound desire to understand the Father's majesty, power, and holiness, all things I had little desire for previously. Before, I had ignored the call God had on my life, choosing to pursue a life where I could call the shots and find my own enjoyment and fun. But now I heard anew God's call for me to be holy (1 Peter 1:16). It's an impossible calling, but its pursuit is how He shapes us to be more like His Son. I just

wanted to find my way back to the Holy One and His light.



To truly understand this calling to be holy, we must first understand the holiness of God. The holiness of God is central to His character. This holiness, this completeness, this action of being whole, is not something we can fully understand. People have been writing and debating for centuries about what it means that God is holy. First and foremost, holiness is not something from us—it is part of God and something only God can give. John puts strong emphasis on this in Revelation 15:4 saying, “Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy.” In her prayer after giving birth to Samuel, Hannah said, “There is no one holy like the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:2).

Truly, God’s holiness is something beyond us. Since none of us has met our Savior face-to-face, we have only small glimpses of the extent of God’s holiness.

First John 3:2 paints a picture of our time meeting God face-to-face being the time when we are made like Him. In essence, our lack of being like Him is our lack of knowing fully about Him (in a relational sense, not a scholastic sense). God says to Isaiah that His ways are not ours and our ways are not His (Isaiah 55:8–9). Paul says in Romans, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’” (Romans 11:33–34). This is an important distinction for us. We do learn about who God is through His Word to us, but a gap exists between who God is and

who we are. We can discuss and describe the incredible color of tropical ocean waters, but we'll never know how bright the blue water is until we stand at the shore's edge ourselves. So it is with God: we can (and should) spend time exploring who God is and what He means for us, but who God is will always be difficult for us to quantify because He is not like us. Until we see Him face-to-face as fully sanctified people, our pursuit of His holiness becoming our own continues.

Many years ago a pastor asked me if I thought I could go without sinning and live perfectly for one minute. He then asked, if one minute were possible, if I could go one hour without sin. And of course, if it was possible to go one hour, then it must be possible to go one day living perfectly, without sin. The danger in this line of thinking is that if we could just try harder we could be like God. This is where the mystery of who God is—the otherness that He is in comparison to us—is vital in our understanding of God. The mystery of God's holiness has often been described in the Latin words *mysterium tremendum*, which depict God as the fearful or awe-full mystery.² Holiness, as the Bible describes God, shows that God is completely other, above our comprehension and beyond our imagination in an awe-inspiring way. We see this awe-full side of God in His interactions with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, while some of the mystery of God is shown in His interactions with Moses in Exodus 3 and 33.

Holiness can't be discussed without looking at the text of Isaiah 6. Isaiah was a prophet to the nation of Israel, which means he was God's mouthpiece to wake up a nation to the purposes of God. Before beginning his prophetic ministry,

Isaiah receives a vision of God from God. It is a striking vision and provides the calling on Isaiah's life to be used as a prophet for God to the nation of Israel. The vision begins with him seeing angelic beings around the Lord who is seated on high. And the angels called out to one another saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). The repetition of the word *holy* is not just for effect; it implies that God, in His holiness, is a perfect holiness.

Isaiah's response upon seeing this holy God is, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). This is one of the most significant verses in the entire Bible because of Isaiah's recognition of depravity in himself after being in the presence of the Lord.

During my nighttime jogs I came to the slow realization of my depravity or lack of ability to do what I knew was right. Paul describes this similarly by saying, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15). The more I caught glimpses of God on those runs, the more I caught wind of my own failures. The holiness of God drove me further into recognition of my own depravity. This is not to say God wants to drive us into a depression where we feel sorry for ourselves. No, He wants us to see our need for Him through our complete ineptitude to do what is right. A professor of mine, Dr. Paul Metzger, describes our state of total depravity in a helpful and accessible way: "We are in a state of total desperation and dependence on God's mercy for forgiveness, cleansing, and new life."³

Isaiah's recognition of his own depravity comes from his vivid vision of God. We are driven to a place of dependence upon God by seeing and recognizing His holiness. In seeing God, Isaiah had seen how small he was and in coming closer to God we should also come to see how small we are.

Growing up in Minnesota I never had the opportunity to see the ocean until we moved to Oregon when I was ten years old. In our trip out to Oregon I had seen the Rocky Mountains for the first time. In Minnesota the only truly big thing is the corn in early fall. Seeing both the Rocky Mountains and the vast Pacific Ocean was a startling reminder of how small I really am. Getting even a small glimpse or vision of our holy God brings us to an awareness of our own depravity and smallness.

We often avoid thinking of God in this way because His holiness can often make us feel like failures as His power and perfection is something we'll never come close to attaining. We would prefer to avoid feeling worthless and in need of help, so rather than pursue God we run away from Him. His holiness is incredibly intimidating to us, especially because we've been taught holiness is found in perfect living. Despite our push against it, God absolutely wants us to be broken, having realized our failure and our need for Him. Isaiah's reaction to the vision of God (Isaiah 6) is a reminder that God's holiness should draw us closer to Him, not push us away. God worked mightily through Isaiah because Isaiah got to the place of brokenness where God could use him. The holiness of God should bring us to a place where we are humbly bowing beneath our holy God in recognition of our need for Him. We need His presence to infiltrate our lives in order for us to become like

Him.

Like Isaiah, we must choose when being confronted with a holy God. We can choose to humbly recognize our need for God or to turn from God into a pursuit of selfish sin. It's an important fork in the road—choosing one path or the other. One road leads to holiness, the other road leads to destruction.

In my loss of innocence, I chose the wrong road. Fortunately God still calls, and He still restores His children who are ready to turn back. God waits for us. Eventually He would restore me, just as He desires to bring you close to Him.

© 2012 by
TYLER BRAUN

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the *Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2000; 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton Illinois 60189, U.S.A. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked THE MESSAGE are from *The Message*, copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Edited by Jim Vincent

Interior design: Smartt Guys design

Cover design: Kathryn Joachim

Cover image: iStock 02-26-08 © Özgür Donmaz

ISBN: 978-0-8024-0507-4

We hope you enjoy this book from Moody Publishers. Our goal is to provide high-quality, thought-provoking books and products that connect truth to your real needs and challenges. For more information on other books and products written and produced from a biblical perspective, go to www.moodypublishers.com or write to:

Moody Publishers
820 N. LaSalle Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60610

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America