

# Holy Man of God

by Vance Havner

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a holy man of God, characterized by holiness and reverence, and the price one must pay to achieve this standard.*

**Duration:** 27:50

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 2:9, 2 Kings 4:9, Matthew 5:48, Matthew 6:33, 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Hebrews 12:14, Revelation 4:8

**Topics:** "Men Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the secret of someone's strength and influence over others. He emphasizes the importance of love and its impact on our lives. The speaker shares his personal experience of being moved by the words of the Bible, specifically from the 15th chapter of the First Corinthians. He encourages the audience to go the extra mile in prayer, Bible study, and communion with God. The sermon also includes anecdotes about mountain preachers and their passionate question, 'How far have you gone?' to challenge listeners to evaluate their commitment to their faith.

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## Transcript

Thank you, Dr. Sweden. Let me take just a moment to express my joy at this privilege of renewed fellowship with you, which began, as you know, fifty years ago. The first fifty years have been fine.

I'm anticipating the next fifty, and the next hundred, and the next thousand, and whatever lies ahead, because ours is a fellowship of earth and of heaven. Christians never meet for the last time. And sometimes I hear people say they've lost a loved one, but if that loved one is in Christ and they are in Christ, they've used the wrong word, they haven't lost them.

Nothing is lost if you know where it is. Death can hide but not divide. Thou art but on Christ's other side.

Thou art with Christ and Christ with me, united still in Christ. Are we? I want you to think about one of the finest tributes ever paid to a preacher. It's 2 Kings 4, 9. You remember that Elisha had visited in the home of a Shunammite, and the lady of the house said to her husband, Let's fix up a prophet's chamber for him, for I perceive that this is a holy man of God which passeth by us continually.

My first pastorate was a country church back in the twenties. I was a bachelor then, and I was a pedestrian. I didn't own a car.

I didn't buy an automobile until I was sixty-six. I wanted to think it over. I did a lot of walking in those days.

This is the day of the motorist, and any man who walks is viewed with suspicion. You see a man coming down the road now, just meditating. You figure he's either out of his head or out of gas, one of the two.

And he's such a rarity that dogs bark as though they'd seen a ghost, and policemen have been known to follow a pedestrian for blocks to make sure he isn't up to something. One memory lingers from that pastorate. Along my route there was a grocery store, and the grocer said one day, Preacher, I want you to know that many a time when things were not going well, I'd looked out my store window, and I saw you going by, and it helped, and I felt better.

He didn't elaborate on that. I've never forgotten it. But it's been my prayer that souls along my beat, as I make my way through these years, might be able to say to some small degree what this Shunammite woman said, I perceive that this is a holy man of God who passes by us continually.

That ought to be the ambition of every preacher and every Christian in their pilgrimage through this world. Luke tells us that when our Lord was on his way to Jericho, somebody told a blind man, Jesus of Nazareth passed by. He's still passing by, but not as then.

He passes by in his people, and particularly in his preachers. He has no hands, no feet but ours, and if this world reads the gospel, it'll be the gospel according to you and me, for most of them don't read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In this same pastorate, I remember that when I came there, I heard a great deal about an old minister of years before by the name of Josiah Elliot.

There had been ministers in that church that went on to prominent pulpits, and I didn't hear much about them. I kept hearing about Josiah Elliot, and I knew he was a very poor man, and he had given what little he had to help boys through school. But I wondered where were the hidings of his power, and where was the secret of his strength? I decided I'd ask my farmer friend, John Brown.

He was an unusual character, never in a hurry, had time to think. He plowed back there on the creek, and I made my way through that cypress swamp one afternoon. Oh, I spent many an afternoon talking to John Brown.

He should have been plowing, and I should have been visiting, but we'd talk all afternoon. Then I'd come back the next morning, and we never said good morning. We just took up where we'd left off the day before and went on with our conversation.

And I said to him, John, all I hear around here is Josiah Elliot. Now, you've had preachers that I have heard about, but these people talk about Josiah Elliot. What was the secret of his strength and the grit that he has on you folks? John leaned on the plowhand and thought a moment as he was wont to do.

And he said, he just loved this. Then he went on plowing, left me standing there. And I made my way back through that cypress swamp while the wood thrush was singing his vespers at the end of a perfect day, and there chimed in my heart something that said, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

And I said, Lord, help me to move into the middle of the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians and set her down for the duration. It's a good place to live. Josiah Elliot was a holy man of God who passed by continually.

You will observe that this woman said three things. I perceive that a holy man of God. Now, a man of God used to be a familiar term, but in this psychedelic age, it indicates a wild and weird and woolly freak.

In the Bible, it meant a man who kept company with the Almighty, like Elijah, until he could say to Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand. And when you've been accustomed to standing before God, kings don't matter much, and big potentates are just small potatoes when you've been standing in the presence of the Most High. Or Enoch, who, like Elijah, went to heaven without dying, no grave, but if he had a monument, I think the epitaph ought to be the Bible epitaph, He walked with God, he pleased God, and God took him.

I'd rather have that on my tombstone than all the laurels this poor world could lay at my feet, or lie in the costliest mausoleum on earth. A lady asked an old bishop over in India, What's the matter with me? I've read all the devotional books, and I pray, and I've taken all the steps they say to step, and I've done all the things they say to do, and still I don't seem to know the Lord. Does God have favorites? The old bishop said, No, not favorites, but God has intimates.

And Moses was one of them, because the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. Nobody knows where Moses' grave is. God was his funeral director.

But if he had a monument, what an epitaph that would be. So these were men of God. Then the Shunammite woman didn't say, I perceive that this is a famous man of God, or a popular, or a brilliant, or a successful, but a holy man of God.

Now such words as holy and holiness have fallen on evil days. That's become a byword, holy this and holy that, and it has come to mean fanaticism, and emotional excesses, and rolling in the hay and foaming at the mouth, and some who have preached the highest standards have sunk lowest in practice, and we've shied away in horror, and we've fallen into a snare, for every Bible doctrine has been carried to extremes at one time or another. And just because some folks go into wildfire doesn't mean the rest of us have to live in a deep freeze.

We don't have to freeze, we don't have to fry either. One thing is certain, the Bible is so full of those words holy and holiness that it takes several pages of concordance to list them. I undertook to check them some time ago and gave up from the high priest wearing holiness unto the Lord on his forehead to the multitude in revelation, crying, holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, this book deserves to be called a holy Bible.

And whether you like holiness or not, you'd better, because without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The world holds a higher standard for us Christians than we hold for ourselves. Clarence True Wilson was a temperance author, and of course you know Clarence Gara was an agnostic and infidel lawyer, but they were friends.

One day Dr. Wilson said to Clarence Gara, I'm going to a meeting, I'm going to speak on at a Methodist holiness meeting. Clarence Gara said, what's holiness? Well, Dr. Wilson said, and then gave him his own definition of it, he said, we believe that Christians can live above the power of sin by the Spirit of God. Clarence Gara thought that one over a moment, and then he said, well, if I should ever be a Christian, that's the kind of Christian I'd want to be.

He had a higher standard than some of us have for ourselves. There's a new variety of preacher today who's not interested in being called a holy man of God. He's a Madison Avenue, hail fellow well-meth, who wants to be called by his first name, just one of the boys.

So anxious to be relevant that he's forgotten how to be reverent. I never cared for reverend as a title, but it did indicate some respect. If this Unamite woman had heard Elisha tell some jokes that some preachers tell at civic club luncheons, she would never have given us this text.

Some time ago, somebody said, but you don't have to wear a halo to be a Christian. Well, who said you had to wear a halo? You don't have to go around with a great big button saying, I'm a Christian, carry a Bible the size of a Chicago telephone directory. But the Bible says that Christians belong to a holy nation, and we ought to show by countenance and conversation and conduct, some of the characteristics of our heavenly nationality.

Dr. Jowett said, we are tempted to leave our noontide lights behind in our study to move among men with a dark lantern, which we can manipulate to suit our company. We pay the tribute of smiles to the low business standard. We pay the tribute of laughter to the fashionable jest.

We pay the tribute of easy tolerance to ambiguous pleasures. We soften everything to a comfortable acquiescence. We seek to be all things to all men to please all.

We run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. We're victims of illicit compromise. There's nothing distinctive about our character as preachers.

We wear gray when we mix with the businessmen of the congregation and talk gray in conversation with them. It's a sad day for a when he's mortally afraid somebody will think he is a preacher. We're living in a day when tragedy has become comedy in America.

We are laughing at things that ought to make us cry, and the cause of Jesus Christ has been hurt more by unwise jokesters than by all infidels. I marvel at the jesting and the flippant remarks that I hear sometimes during revival. You remember when Uzzah tried to study the Ark and dropped dead? Have you ever studied what exactly was the sin of Uzzah? It must be pretty serious for God to strike a man dead.

Well, he, for one thing, was the son of Abinadab, and all his life the Ark had been in his house. It was a familiar piece of furniture. He'd seen it all these years, and the Ark had become just a box.

He had lost his regard for the sacredness of it as a symbol of God's presence among his people. And old Matthew Henry says, perhaps he affected to show before this great assembly how bold he could make with the Ark, having been so long acquainted with it. Familiarity even with that which is most awful is apt to breed contempt.

Now, Uzzah was a Levite, but he wasn't a priest, and only the priest could touch the Ark, Numbers 4.15, and that only under certain circumstances. We're Levites, we're priests. You believe in the priesthood of the believers.

It's a sad day, my friend, when the Ark becomes a box, when you become so familiar with scripture and worship and the ordinances, that you lose your reverence. Alexander McLaren said it was a lost sense of awe in the case of Uzzah. Nothing is more delicate than a sense of awe.

Trifle with it ever so little, and it speedily disappears. Watch the average Sunday morning congregation. You don't see much awe out there.

What you see is not awe, it's awful. And relevance has become more important than reverence. You can take God's name in vain at church.

You don't have to curse to take God's name in vain. You can do it when you stand and sing, My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine for thee. All the follies of sin are resigned when you haven't done it.

Have thine own way, Lord. Hold o'er my being absolute sway, and you don't mean it. A tourist in Africa chanced on some boys playing what looked like a game of marbles.

He drew near and discovered they were playing marbles with diamonds, because that was South Africa, where in those days diamonds were mined. Playing marbles with diamonds, and we're doing that in the church today. I've read of a girl who was touring Europe, and in Vienna she went to the museum where there is kept on display Beethoven's piano.

And this poor little thing sat down and played some rock and roll on it, and the old caretaker endured it, and after it was over, he said, Padreski was through here some years ago, and oh, she said, and what did he play? Nothing, said the caretaker. He said he was not worthy to touch Beethoven's piano. I'm sure that poor little thing must have gone out of there red in the face if she was capable of embarrassment.

It's an awful thing to treat the earth like a box. In cheap familiarity, the holy things have gone. Watch that.

Somebody has said there's no greater hindrance to true spirituality than a superficial acquaintance with the language of Christianity from childhood. Now, that sounds like a rather questionable statement, but I've thought that over. I grew up in a Christian home, and I thank God for it, but it's dangerous.

I read through the New Testament I don't know how many times when I was a very small boy. I have articles I wrote for the paper when I was nine, was licensed at 11, and ordained when I was 15. But there came a day when I had to back myself into a corner and say, hey, you, is this real, or is it something you've learned until you can recite it? Is this real to you? If we ever have a confrontation with a holy God, and if God ever visits us again in true revival, it'll end this prostitution of holy things, and we'll be red in the face with embarrassment about some of the silly things we've been doing to try to put the gospel over.

Oh, you say we must relate and communicate to the New Age when we're not doing it too well, with all the new technique. We're not cutting the mustard. We're preaching happiness instead of holiness.

God didn't save you to make you happy. That's a byproduct, but he saved you to make you holy. You are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son.

Now, if you want to be popular, preach happiness. If you want to be unpopular, preach holiness. Oh, you say, but doesn't the Bible tell us if you know these things, happy are you if you do them? Yes, but it's conditioned on two ifs, knowing the word of God and doing the will of God.

And who wants to hear about that now? There's a price to pay to be a holy man of God. You have to buck the current because the tide's running the other way. Now, what was the secret of Elisha, the holy man of God? Do you remember that day when Elijah was to be translated? This prophet who had lived all his life in a furious tempest was going to heaven in a fiery whirlwind.

Elisha made up his mind to be there when it happened. Elijah tried to shake him off at Bethel and at Jericho and Jordan, but Elisha said, I will not leave thee. He knew he was the successor to Elijah.

He wanted a double portion, not twice as much, but the elder brother's portion. The preacher that God honors today is the man who has made up his mind to have the best God has for him and will not be put off with anything less. Now, along that road that day, there were some seminary students, and they knew something was going to happen.

They inquired about it. Fifty of them stood to view it afar off, but nothing happened to them. And that's as close as some people ever get to a double portion of God's blessing.

They hear about it and talk about it. They're in the vicinity, but they never see the chariots of fire, and Elijah's mantle is not for them. Beloved, it is not enough to live in the neighborhood of a miracle.

Holy men of God don't live on hearsay and secondhand experiences. There are plenty of schools of the prophets these days along the roadside gossiping like these young prophets did, but it's only once in a while that an Elisha says, I'm going through to a double portion into the prophet's mantle. You remember what he said to those preachers? Hold your peace.

Men who are in dead earnest don't engage in idle chatter with roadside reverends. Elijah's translation wasn't a subject for idle speculation. It wasn't a temporary excitement.

Elisha knew it was for him the opportunity of a lifetime, and if he blew it, he'd be an ordinary preacher the rest of his days. And the preacher who's out for God's best doesn't have any time to waste on bystanders. Some stop at Bethel, and some stop at Jericho, and never get to Jordan because they talk it over with the schools of the prophets.

The preacher who's out for the prophets will do well to say to all these seminarians who talk about it, hold your peace. Don't you let anybody stop you short of God's best for you. He went the distance that makes the difference.

Down our way we used to have on radio over Sunday morning a lot of little mountain preachers and country preachers, and they loved God and won souls. They did terrible things to the King's English sometimes, but they were great souls. And one morning one of those old boys was holding forth on the text.

He went a little farther, and every once in a while in the sermon he'd fairly blast the elements by yelling, how far have you went? Well, I wouldn't have minded it if he'd said it just once, but every once in a while, how far have you went? Finally I couldn't take it any longer. I was sitting there all alone. I yelled back at him.

I said, brother, you done went too far now. But it is quite a question. You know what Ruth said to Naomi, I'm going through in treatment not to leave thee.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her. We've got a lot of saints today who give the Lord a kiss once in a while. God wants people who say, where thou goest I will go, where thou lodgest I will lodge.

Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. She went on to be the great grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Judas betrayed my Lord, not with a slap.

Jesus Christ is being betrayed more today with a kiss than with a slap. We notice the slaps and say, isn't that awful? But plenty of people give him a kiss of respect and never follow him. Have you gone the distance that makes the difference? I was preaching to a crowd of preachers in East Tennessee in the mountains a summer a year ago.

I got up every morning before breakfast to climb one of those mountains because I still can get up them. And it's a little rough, and I got about halfway, and discretion told me that maybe since I'm not quite as young as I used to be, I ought to settle for that. But I saw a light place up there among the trees, and I said, I believe if I reach it there'll be a view.

And I made it, and I was rewarded with a panorama that I'll never forget. And I said as I stood there that early in the morning and looked out upon that unforgettable sight, well, the difference is worth the distance. And it is.

That extra mile of prayer, that extra time with your Bible, that extra season of communion. Oh, William Lowe said, who am I to lie folded up in the bed late of the morning when the farmers have gone about their work and I'm so far behind with my sanctification. Well, we're all behind with that.

Jim A. before he went to Ecuador, is a young man, this isn't an old man talking, said, I went to a friend's house last night to look at television, and God laid on my heart Psalm 119, 37, turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. He writes, like one of the old mystics, it's that extra mile that sings my heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise. Fears dismay, though some may dwell where these are bound.

My prayer, my aim is higher ground. I'm not going to label that experience. We argue about it, whatever you want to call it.

It's that extra mile that gets through to God's best. And then this Shunammite woman said, this is a man of God, a holy man of God that passeth by us continually. Elisha didn't hide in a cave and polish his halo.

He walked among men. Our Lord didn't spend his days lecturing in some secluded spot far from the maddened crowds ignoble strife. He went about doing good.

Jesus was always passing by. And so must we, because if we say we abide in him, we ought to walk like he walked. And our walk must match our talk.

Elisha was available to everybody from kings to commoners, and they all beat a path to his door. He solved the water problem at Jericho, put a prophet's wife in the oil business at a profit, raised the Shunammite's son, healed Naaman of his leprosy, purified the poison in the pot, recovered Lostack's heads, relieved the famine, anointed Jehu, led the Syrians blind into Samaria. And after he died, and long after he'd been buried, they lured somebody else's corpse on the bones of that old prophet, and that fellow came to.

Even his corpse woke up the dead. I tell you, that old preacher had a lot of vitality in his system. He had more power dead than the rest of us have living.

I made a trail of blessing. Two springtimes ago I spent some weeks in the Ozarks. I love it in the springtime in the mountains.

And an old mountain missionary took me way back beyond, back in the hills, to show me some of his work. And he told me about his predecessor, said he did a great work there. He said he used to drive an old ramshackle automobile down these crooked trails, and he had a sort of an amplifier in there, and he'd come down those crooked roads singing at the top of his voice, I know the Lord will make a way for me.

I know the Lord will make a way for me. If I live a holy life, shun the wrong and do the right, I know the Lord will make a way for me. And they say the mountain folks would stop whatever they were doing and listen.

And then they'd say that's the missionary going home. That's a great way to go home, brother. That's the way I want to go home.

And I want somebody to be able to say along the way, there's a holy man of God who passed by us. There was another character who used to be around Moody Bible Institute, and I thought so much of him, Homer Hammond Tree. Homer Hammond Tree grew up in little old greenback Tennessee, sang the gospel all over the land, taught music here.

Out of the hills he came and back to the hills he went. All his life he was just a big old Tennessee mountain boy. Well, last fall I was preaching in Johnson City and Knoxville and Maryville, and I said to the preacher, where is greenback Tennessee? And he said, it's not far out here.

I said, let's go over there. And I found the country cemetery, and I found Hammond Tree's grave. He never married.

He lay there alone beside a big shade tree. And on that tombstone, the words which I believe are on Mr. Moody's tombstone, or part of it at least, the world passeth away and the less thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. The last time I heard Hammond Tree sing, he and Paul Beckwith sang the story of Jesus will never grow old.

It's good to grow old singing a song that won't grow old, that ageless theme that the ears cannot dim, nor time outdate. He that doeth the will of God, that's success, that's fulfillment. And if a man miss that, he's failed, though his corpse be housed in the stateless mausoleum.

But if he does God's will, he's a success, though he resteth to finish in a country churchyard out in the hills. Well, I came from those hills just across the line in North Carolina, not far. And when my journey is over, I could wish to go back to those hills, and I could wish that all those whose lives are touched along the road might be able to say, to some degree, I perceive that this was a holy man of God who passed for us.

Continue. And may that be said of you and of me, that we were holy men and holy women. Let's turn in our hymn books to hymn number 325.

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