

Lou Holtz addressing the 2016 Greater Houston Prayer Breakfast

Spencer Tillman (introducing Lou Holtz): The young man, and I'll call him young man because, in terms of eternity, he's just a blip. But I have the pleasure of introducing to you—it's like yesterday's wine, it gets better with time, Sylvester. Lou Holtz is a one of a kind, he is a true original in terms of leaders. You know, in the broadcast business, we are in the business of describing people who lead or run and jump, and they can do these things well and some not so much. But when we describe Lou Holtz, Lou Holtz doesn't really fit into a category; he really creates one. And I'm not your speaker today, but I could sit here and talk to you for hours about how this man has impacted people whom he's never met before, whom he'll never know he's met before. I was one such one of those young individuals in North Tulsa, Oklahoma, when, around circa 1978, as a diehard Oklahoma Sooner fan, as I was gearing up with my Billy Simms jersey on waiting to watch Oklahoma compete against Arkansas in the Orange Bowl. And I saw in the newspaper that Lou Holtz had fired his top three players. And I was thinking to myself we've got this one in the bag. And I'm here to tell you, and I bet if I ask for a show of hands, nobody in this room would know who Roland Sales was. But I know who Roland Sales is today. He was one of those three players that supplanted one of the backs that he kicked off the team. Nobody thought he would win, but he did. Roland Sales, if I remember, rushed 208 yards, something like that, 207 see, he's got me, 207 yards this guy remembers it all, man, 207 yards and just crushed, ripped the heart out of my Oklahoma Sooners. Lou Holtz I have to blame for that, all these years later. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to some and present to others the incomparable, the one and only, Lou Holtz. Lou Holtz will bless you.

Lou Holtz: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Spencer. That's a beautiful introduction, and I'm a fan of yours—this guy's so talented. What a great evening, uh great morning. Unbelievable, and I think it was 1974 this was started by Mr. John Tolson, and the reason it was started because men weren't showing enough Christian leadership in the family, and look what it's grown to. But this is the first time since you've had this meeting that you've had a homeless man speak to you. See, my house burned down June 22nd to the ground, so I'm a homeless man here, but I am very fortunate; I'm blessed because we have a strong faith in God. My wife is

very religious. Absolutely. I believe this from the bottom of my heart. I don't know exactly where we go or how we go, but I do know Who holds the future—when we put our faith and confidence, and it's great for me to be here, and I'm so thankful because last Friday my wife, an 18-year survivor of Stage 4 cancer, 18 years ago they gave her a 10% chance to live; last Friday, we just got word that the lung cancer they thought she had is just an infection. So, praise the Lord for my wife. I gotta tell ya.

A lot of things in this world that I don't understand. I don't understand how a black cow eats green grass and produces white milk and yellow cheese. I don't understand why they sell hotdogs in packages of eight, and hotdog buns in packages of six. I don't know. Why does a sick person have to go all the way to the back of the drugstore to get medicine, and somebody else can buy cigarettes at the door? It makes no sense to me. Why does a kamikaze pilot wear a helmet? There's so many things I don't understand, but I'll tell you what I really, truly don't understand. I don't understand how anybody in this world can possibly not believe in God and in Jesus Christ our Savior. It just boggles my mind. See, I had back surgery. I've had two back surgeries, two neck surgeries. And it's amazing, you go in there and the doctor's explaining everything that happens in the back and how it is organized. And then they gave me a questionnaire and it says who should we contact in case of an emergency because you're going to have serious surgery, and I put down the doctor. Don't call my wife; she can't do anything. But, when you look at the back and how it is. And let's remember this. See, you can see me cause you have something like a hundred thousand fibers in your eyes, or you can hear me because you have 24,000 receptors in your ears, and you look at the muscles and the blood, and you look at your heart beating year after year and all the different things that happen. You look at the reproductive system. You look at the brain. Are you going to tell me that happened by accident? And then you realize that eleven of the twelve Apostles died as martyrs. They aren't going to die for a lie. And you just look around and time after time how in the world could you not believe?

We all have our doubts. I can't begin to tell you how many times I prayed when Michigan was on our 4-yard line. Oh God, I tell you what, You stop 'em and I'll change my life. It's like the guy who needed a parking place. He couldn't find one; he was driving all around. Finally, in

desperation, he looked up and said “Dear Lord, You find me a parking place, and I’ll go to church every Sunday the rest of my life. I’ll give up drinking and profanity.” And just then miraculously a parking spot opened up, and he looked up at Heaven and said “Forget it, God, I found one on my own.”

And we all have that faith. Oh God, there’s no doubt in my mind You separated the waters for the Israelites to leave Egypt. I have no doubt for forty years You provided manna. And God, I’ll tell You something else, there’s no doubt in my mind that You brought Lazarus back from the dead. But see God, I can’t trust You because You don’t know how good Michigan is. We all have that faith. We just don’t put it sometimes.

And I grew up a Christian. All my life. My grandparents were very strong Christians, so I just grew up that way. You went to church every single Sunday. And I do that to this day. You see, a family that prays together, stays together. Even though my schedule’s been hectic during coaching, every Sunday without fail, my wife, my four children, we went to church and then we went to breakfast. We have four children, and they’re all girls, but two. I’m real proud of that fact.

And I want to pause here, when I’m talking about my wife and say if you really want some good advice, listen to your spouse. Nobody knows you any better, loves you any more, wants you to succeed any more, and will be any more honest with you. I remember when I was at Ohio State, and we won the national championship, there’s a billboard that said “Behind every successful person, stands a very surprised mother-in-law.” And that’s true in my case.

I’ve been married 55 years. Two years ago I was playing golf and said I was married to my best friend. My partner said “Is your wife your best friend?” and I said “Yes, she is.” Well, try this, he said “Your dog’s your best friend.” I said “You’re wrong.” He said “Lock your wife and your dog in the trunk of the car, and come back in two hours and see which one is happy to see you.” So, maybe it is the dog.

But I have been blessed. I have been blessed because I was raised in a Christian home. I was raised that you believe in God and you go to

church, and there wasn't any alternative. See, whatever we believe politically, economically, socially, and religiously, is what our parents believe. And then you go to college or you go away and you leave home. You gotta make those decisions all over again. And that's why it's who you're going to associate with is so very important to you. See, I've been blessed. I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I understand that. See, I was born in the Depression. My father had gone to the third grade. That was all the education he had. I was born in a cellar by Dr. McGraw, not in a hospital. We had one bedroom for my sister, my self, and my parents. No closet. We had a kitchen and a half bath, and in the half bath there was not a sink, a tub, or a shower. There was no welfare, no food stamps, no safety net, but I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth because of what I was taught. First of all, I was taught that I was born in this country, and how blessed I am, and anything can happen if you're willing to get an education and persevere and overcome problems and understand you're going to have difficulties and obstacles, and above all you get an education and believe in God, and in Jesus Christ and believe you're not alone, and no matter what happens, somebody's going to be with you. That's why I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, not because of what I had, but because of what I was taught.

And that belief today is still with me, and I thank my parents for instilling that in me, and I think that's our obligation to instill that in our children as well, but when I went away to school, I also was fortunate to be associated with people who had a strong faith in God as well. That doesn't mean mean your faith doesn't wanders at times. That doesn't mean that you don't create problems or that everybody's going to love you. No, that doesn't happen. I had a nun in the seventh grade named sister Mary Harranty who didn't like me with pretty good justification, cause I was always saying things that irritated her. There was a time Catholics couldn't eat meat on Friday the entire year around, and you had to eat fish. I didn't like fish, so every Friday I'd complain "I wish the Apostles had been ranchers rather than fisherman." I was convinced. Someone said "Well, why didn't you become a vegetarian?" Vegetarian is an old Indian word that stood for bad hunter. And then I asked the nun questions she couldn't answer. "Why did Paul keep writing to the Corinthians when they never wrote him back? But you go back, and it's the faith and the belief.

You know, I'm going to make five assumptions about the people in this audience today. First assumption I'm going to make is you want to be a better Christian and you want to be successful in your professional life. The second assumption that I'm going to make about the people in this room is that you want to have a good, happy personal life. The third assumption I'm going to make is that you want to feel needed. You know, ask yourself this question "If you didn't go home, who would miss you and why?" "If you didn't go to work, who would miss you and why?" "If your business ceased to function, who would miss you and why?" See, ladies and gentlemen, the only people we miss are those that add value to other people's lives, but we all want to feel needed by other people. The fourth assumption I'm going to make is that you want to feel secure about your future. The fifth assumption I'm going to make is that you want to go to Heaven. I'm going to make those five assumptions, and I'm going to show you how all of them can be reached very easily, and it's not complicated.

The one assumption I cannot make is whether you want to keep growing as a Christian or whether you're going to try to maintain. See, there's a rule that you're either growing or you're dying. The trees that grow on earth die, and so does a person, and so does a business. It doesn't have a thing to do with age. I'm so old now my birthday candles cost more than the cake. But it has everything to do with are we trying to get better, are we trying to improve, or are we trying to just maintain our Christian life going to church every Sunday. Okay, that's good enough. Or, are we really and truly trying to learn to walk with the Lord? See, that's an assumption that you can make; I cannot answer that. I cannot assume that you want to continue to grow in your faith. That's just something that you can say.

When I left Notre Dame, I never thought I'd coach again. Where do you go from Notre Dame? According to my mother, you go directly to Heaven and you sit by the Pope. You don't coach any more. We took Notre Dame on the very bottom; we took it to the very top. For nine straight years we went to a January 1 Bowl: the Sugar, the Cotton, the Orange, and the Fiesta. Nobody had done it before, and nobody has done it since. We finished second in the country, and everybody called me an idiot. A guy who finishes last in medical school, and they call him doctor. Incidentally, a guy that played on some of those great teams, a great player, is John Foley

over here. John played for me at the University of Notre Dame. Great seeing you.

The point I make. You get on top, you say this is pretty good, let's not risk it, let's not change anything, let's maintain. Anytime you try to maintain anything in your life, you have no enthusiasm, you have no excitement; you're not getting a bit better. When I went to Notre Dame, it's absolutely true, I don't exaggerate this at all. Father Joyce said there are certain things here at Notre Dame that are not negotiable. Don't think you're going to come in here and change them." I said "What are they?" He said "We don't take transfers. We don't red shirt. We don't have an athletic dorm. We play a difficult schedule. We have high academic standards." He said "The other thing we aren't going to change—we have a policy that the head coach of Notre Dame is not allowed to make more than the President of Notre Dame, and the President of Notre Dame is a Priest who took the vow of poverty." They paid me \$95,000, and I paid them \$75,000 because I had three children at Notre Dame, and free tuition didn't kick in for five years.

And then Father Hesburn said to me, and I'll never forget this, he said "I'm going to name you the head coach of Notre Dame. We're going to go into that press conference, and I'm going to announce to the world that you're the head coach at Notre Dame. What I cannot announce to the world is that you're the leader of the Notre Dame football team." He said "I can give you that title because titles come from above. But what I cannot do is name you a leader." I said "What makes a leader, Father?" He said "If you're going to be a leader in anything, leader of your family, leader of a business, or leader of a team, you have to have a vision where you want to go, a vision of how you're going to get there—a vision of where you're going to go and then you have to have a plan of how you're going to get there. He said you also have to lead by example. You have to hold people accountable for the choices they make. But, most important of all, if you're going to be a leader, you have to make sure everybody understands the core values that you believe in." You see, what holds a country together, what holds a family together is core values. You don't have to like one another, you don't have to like the same music, but you have to share the same core values. That's what holds you together. If you want to be a leader, and I don't care, and the Mayor what good leadership you've

provided, but you have to have a vision and a plan, but above all, you have to have core values what we believe.

And I want to give three simple rules so maybe you can realize those five assumptions. And they aren't complicated, but with these things, I promise you, you'll never need a fourth. It's not complicated. We complicate life. Do you realize there are only seven colors on the rainbow? Look what Michelangelo did with them. There's only seven musical notes. Look what Beethoven did with them. There's only 10 numbers. Look what Bernie Madoff did with those 10 numbers. It doesn't always have to be good, but it doesn't have to be complicated. And I just try to keep things simple. We have federal laws, county laws, state laws, corporate laws, by-laws, in-laws and outlaws. I want to give you three laws. Law number one: do right. Do what's right and avoid doing what's wrong. There's never a right time to do the wrong thing. There's never a wrong time to do the right thing. Just do the right thing. I think it's right to be honest. It's right to be on time. I think it's wrong to practice sexism, racism, spouse abuse. I think it's wrong to find a teammate's wallet before he lost it. That's called stealing, son. Yeah, I found his wallet, but he hadn't lost it yet. Just do what's right. I think it's right to have the correct attitude. See, God gave us a lot of wonderful powers. We have the power to love, to think, to create, to imagine, to plan. But the greatest power we have in this world is the power to choose. We can choose to act or procrastinate, believe or doubt, pray or curse, help or heal, succeed or fail, but the attitude we choose is, by far, the most important choice we make every single day.

You know, I've done TV and I've since retired, but people say "Did you have fun doing it?" Not really. I'd be up there in Bristol, Connecticut, which is fifteen minutes from Hartford by telephone. And I'm on there with a guy named Mark May. Now I want to tell you, Mark May is one of the most beautiful people in this world. He's smart, he's intelligent, he's a professional, I love him like a brother, but we had a true difference of opinion on the air. We had no teleprompter, no script, no rehearsal, but we had a difference of opinion. Mark made suggestions, I made decisions. Mark was a player, I was a coach. He showered after work, I showered before work. He signed the paycheck on the back, I signed it on the front. Just a difference of opinion. Now, as I would say to Mark all the time, Mark

I would love to agree with you, but if I did, we'd both be wrong. And that's not fair.

But I think above all just have fun with what you do, because when they turned the red light on, I was going to have more fun than anyone else, because if you have fun doing something, if you have fun being a Christian, people will want to be around you. They don't want to be around people who are always negative and moody. They want to be around people who are excited about life. Doesn't mean you don't do dumb things. Doesn't mean you don't make mistakes. I got on TV one time and called the University of Auburn. For the next week, I had to get on and apologize. I had to get on the air. I understand now it's Auburn University. I made the mistake. You wrote, you told me. I appreciate it. I'm a quick learner. I won't make the mistake again. You don't have to write to me any more. I got it. I then turned to Reese Davis while we were still on the air, and I said "Reese, I had no idea that many people from Auburn could write." You know, I got lots of nasty letters then.

We let too many other people dictate our attitude; we let too many people control the way we think and the way we feel. We can't do that. You know these are choices you make. Be proud about being a Christian. Too many times you get out in the public and you're embarrassed to say that you have faith in the Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and He died on the Cross for our sins. Sometimes we're afraid. You can't do that. You can't let other people intimidate you. You can't let other people control your attitude. Several years ago, we took Notre Dame to play Florida in the Sugar Bowl coached by Steve Spurrier, great coach. They had a great team. I felt we'd win. We eventually did, but not many people thought we could. And I always wanted our team to be home with their family over Christmas Eve, so I sent them home for two days. During those two days, I took my wife and I took my four children to Orlando. We went out for dinner, and I'm in a great mood. And a waiter came up and said "You're Lou Holtz, the head coach at Notre Dame, aren't you?" And I said "Yes, sir" and I took out my pen thinking he wanted an autograph. And he said "What's the difference between Notre Dame and Cheerios?" I said "I don't have a clue." He said "Cheerios belong in a bowl and Notre Dame doesn't." You know. It just upsets you. You're in Florida. You're competitive. It makes you mad. I want to tell you he put me in a bad

mood. And finally, my wife said “You’re going to let somebody you never met before, never going to see again, doesn’t care a thing about you, and you’re going to let him ruin your evening because of something stupid he said.” She said “You cannot let other people control your attitude.” And she was right. My attitude changed, and I had a great evening. A little bit later I called the waiter back over and I said, “Son, let me ask you a question. What’s the difference between Lou Holtz and a golf pro?” He said “I don’t have a clue.” I said “A golf pro gives tips,” which he found out when the meal was over. I could talk forever, but just do what’s right. Just do what’s right.

Rule number two. Do everything to the very best of your ability with the time allotted. Not everybody can be All-american. Not everybody can be first team. But everybody can be the best they are capable of being. Now, one thing I learned about leadership, and I believe this, also. As a Christian, our obligation is to make people the very best they can be. God did not put us on this earth to be average. He put us on this earth to be the very best that we can possibly be. You want to talk about people who are committed to excellence. The one thing you should be taught in the home, and reinforced in the school, is respect for parents, respect for elders, respect for teachers, respect for coaches, and respect for the law. When you introduced the patrolmen and the firemen, I could not help but think on 9/11 how many of those brave people went into a burning building and saved somebody’s life. What a great effort that is. And then you meet somebody from the clergy. As great as it is to save somebody’s life, think how much greater it is to save somebody’s soul. Cause when you save somebody’s soul, you save it for eternity. Life is for a matter of years. That’s why we need to be proud of everything we’re doing, and do everything to the best of your ability. Woody Hayes said “If you want a friend, buy a dog, but if you’re in a leadership role, your obligation is to make people the very best they can be.” And that’s why we have rule number two.

And then rule number three is simple, also. Just show people you care. Everybody wants to know “Do you care about me?” Everybody’s got problems; everybody’s got difficulties. You know there isn’t anybody in this room that doesn’t need a kind word and a smile and encouragement. My wife and I are opposites as night and day. She says opposites attract, and

then attack. And she doesn't have much of a sense of humor, but she left me a note not long ago. She said "Lou, I can't please everybody in the world, so I'm going to stop trying, and I'm going to focus on pleasing one person a day. Today's not your day, and tomorrow doesn't look real promising either." But she's done one interview in her entire life. And that's cause it had to do with cancer. And they asked her "What did you learn from having cancer?" She said "I learned how much my family loved me." See, we didn't love her any more. We just showed up. Why do we have to wait for someone to have a catastrophe in our life? Why do we have to wait for somebody to experience difficulty before we reach out and let them know how much we care about them? And, if you have love in a country, you're going to have great success. If you have love on a team, the most important thing is developing a feeling of loving and caring for each other. And when we won the National Championship, people would say would you write "Won the national championship in '88." and I would write "Won in '88, shafted in '89, '90, and '93." But no, I'm not bitter.

But we were at the White House and then we took the charter plane back home, and that same night a guy named Bobby Satterfield died of a congenital heart defect. And I was awakened at 1:30 in the morning, and I said to the operator "Make sure all our team is in a team meeting at 7:30 in the morning." I wanted to tell them. They came in there in a great mood. They thought I was resigning. Why else would coach have a team meeting at 7:30? When I told them Bobby Satterfield had died, one young man passed out, several cried openly. If you were in that room, you couldn't tell if Bobby Satterfield was offense or defense, white or black, first team, third team, scholarship, non-scholarship, from California or New York, you couldn't tell. But, I'll tell you what you could tell. There was a love and a feeling and a caring that we lost one of ours. Bobby Satterfield was a black defensive back from California, a non-scholarship walk-on, third team. He wasn't a great player, but he was part of the family, part of caring? And that's what makes things great, that's what made it special. You know, I've been so blessed in my life. Those are the only three rules I have.

Now, you people are probably going to throw me out of here, but I gotta make a confession. My wife said you talk about loving people, and you have that bumper sticker. I have a bumper sticker on my car. I stop at a red light, and people get out and take a picture of it. We go to church on

Sunday, my wife makes me park in the back of the lot, and back it in, so people can't see it. But I thought it was a clever bumper sticker. It said "Jesus loves you; everybody else thinks you're an asshole." That's what it says; I just thought it was clever. But the fact remains. We have an obligation, and, ladies and gentlemen, those are the only three rules you ever had. Do the right thing. Do the very best you can and show people you care.

Why are those three rules so important? Because there's just three questions people ever ask you. There's three questions that have to be answered whether you're in business, whether you're in Christian life. Question number one: Can I trust you? See, without trust, there can be no relationship with other people. We talk about getting together. It's got to be based on we can trust one another. Now, the only way I know that you can get people to trust you is always do the right thing. That's why it's important to do what's right, so people can trust you. The second question people want to know is "Are you committed to excellence?" "That's why it's important to always do everything to the very best of your ability. The third thing people want to know is "Do you care about me?"

There isn't any such thing as magic. I fool around with magic a little bit. It's like any other newspaper. You have the front page for people who want to read the news. You have the comics for people who can't read. And you have the editorial page for people who can't think. Take two people. It can be anybody in this world. Take somebody you love and admire and respect or it can be someone you have a problem with. Put these three questions on both people, a simple yes or no. Can you trust them, yes or no? Are they committed to excellence, yes or no? Do they care about you and the organization, yes or no? I guarantee the person you admire and respect is the one who said yes to all three questions. I used to do this with a phone book when I was younger, but I have a little problem with that. I guarantee the person you have a problem with, you have pinpointed the problem. See, we all think there's such a thing as magic, in what you do and how you do it. And there really isn't. But I guarantee you this. Now. Okay.

Spencer said "How did he do that?" Perfectly, I thought. But, in any event, I wake up in the middle of the night screaming because I can't figure

it out either, but the only thing I've tried to do is make sure people can trust me, know I'm committed, and know you genuinely care about them. Now, I'm blessed and honored to be here, but when somebody violates those three rules, I had 'em for our players and coaches, you sit down and you never criticize the performer, but you must criticize their performance as a leader. And you say "Skip, I don't believe you're doing the best you can in Spanish Two and here's why. You got an A in Spanish One; you're getting a D in Spanish Two, missed class three times, missed study hall twice, and I don't believe that's the best you can do, and I want to know why." You never criticize a performer, but, as a leader, you have an obligation to criticize the performance. And, being a strong Christian, does not mean you let everything go. It means you love them, but you love them so much, you want them to be the very best they can be. And in the Orange Bowl, I never disciplined the athlete, all I did was enforce their decision. You choose to do this, you're choosing not to play. Life is a matter of choices. You can choose to believe or not, but whatever happens to you wherever you are, it's because of the choices you make. But, by far the most important choice you'll make is to bring Jesus Christ into your life and make sure you're not maintaining, but you're trying to grow. And I leave you with this very last thought. Want to be happy for an hour? Eat a steak. Want to be happy for a day? Play golf. Want to be happy for a week? Go on a cruise. Now, to me, going on a cruise is like being in jail, except you have a chance to drown, but that's what's you've got (?). Want to be happy for a month? Buy a new car. Want to be happy for a year? Win the lottery. Want to be happy for a lifetime? Put your life in Jesus Christ's hands. Thank you for having me.