SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God high and lifted up—holy and glorious in His temple. In light of God’s holiness, Isaiah received a proper vision of his own sin and unworthiness. But God, in His grace, restored Isaiah to service and gave the prophet a message for the people. Like Isaiah, we are also undone by the vision of God’s glory. Thankfully, through His grace, God deals with our sin and commissions us to deliver His message of love to the world.

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 6:1-8
THE POINT

The reality of sin can only be rightly understood when compared to God's personal holiness.

INTRO/STARTER  5-10 MINUTES

Option 1
Holiness is a difficult concept for many Christians to grasp, and holy living is difficult to put into practice. But there is no backing away from this character trait—holiness is essential to the Christian life. We are to be holy, just as our God is holy.

In previous sessions, we have seen how God reveals Himself—through spectacular miracles and quiet whispers, through encouraging words and challenging commands. Today, we are introduced to the prophet Isaiah, a man who had a magnificent vision of God that altered his life forever.

As we approach this passage about Isaiah’s vision of God, it would be normal to feel a sense of nervousness in considering the “holiness of God.” Like Isaiah, we might feel like the whole of our existence has been mixed with a lot that is “not holy.” Not only that, but we might struggle to comprehend Isaiah’s vision and the awe that it should produce in us. The vision of God was terrifying to Isaiah, and yet God’s purpose was not for destruction, but for redemption.

• What comes to mind when you think of the word holy? Why do you think God is so serious about His holiness?

Option 2
On a white board at the front of the room, write out the words Who’s coming over? As students make their way to a seat, instruct them to think about three famous people they would like to hang out with. Make sure students know that these famous people can be living or dead. After a few minutes, invite the students to share their answers. Note the people they have in common. Then, ask them to discuss things like: If you ate a meal together, what would you serve? What would you wear? What questions would you ask them? What would you talk about? Choose three of the people your students mentioned and talk about what it would be like to hang out with those people and how the students would respond to them. After discussing this for a minute, ask:

• Would your answers change if Jesus was one of your guests? If so, how? If not, why?

Then talk about how our reaction to God should be different because He is holy. As His people, He has also called us to be holy, and to respond to Him in awe and reverence.
THE POINT

The reality of sin can only be rightly understood when compared to God's personal holiness.

CHARACTERS

- The Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Isaiah - prophet of God who is most known for his prophecies of the coming Messiah

PLOT

At this point in God’s story we meet the prophet Isaiah. We see he had a vision of God high and lifted up—holy and glorious in His temple. In light of God’s holiness, Isaiah received a proper sense of his own sin and unworthiness. But God, in His grace, restored Isaiah to service and gave the prophet a message for the people. Like Isaiah, we are also undone by the vision of God’s glory.
ISAIAH ENCOUNTERS GOD IN THE TEMPLE

Isaiah’s vision took place in the year the ruler of Judah, King Uzziah, died. Uzziah was set upon the throne of Judah at age 16 after the people conspired against and killed his father, King Amaziah (2 Chron. 25–26). Uzziah was a king who did what was right in God’s eyes, in accordance with the teachings of Zechariah. He became a famous and powerful king throughout the land.

Though God made him a strong ruler, over time Uzziah grew arrogant and unfaithful. Enraged at the priests who warned him, Uzziah entered into the Holy of Holies to burn incense on the altar of sacrifice himself. In that moment, the Lord struck him with leprosy, a disease that remained with him until his death. In all, Uzziah reigned for 52 years.

In 2 Chronicles 26, we read that Isaiah chronicled Uzziah’s reign. It is likely Isaiah was greatly affected by the death of the king. Within that context, here is Isaiah’s testimony of what took place on the day of his vision:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:1-4)

- Take a few minutes to jot down the different words and phrases that describe Isaiah’s vision of God. What do these words communicate? What atmosphere do these phrases create? (p. 28, PSG)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

The seraphim (“fiery” winged creatures) surrounding Him cover themselves in humility. In the presence of God, these winged creatures also cry out the truth of God’s character: “holy, holy, holy!” Repeating the word “holy” three times is intended to express the great difference between God and His creation. “God’s holiness reveals how very separate, different, totally other he is in comparison to all other aspects of the created world.” Furthering the awe-inspiring scene in Isaiah’s vision, the voices of the seraphim call to one another, rocking the very foundation of the building.
From what Isaiah recounted, we can see that the Lord is exalted above all kings, a truth displayed by God being on “a throne, high and lifted up.” His presence exceeds that of any human ruler on earth, because the Lord’s presence fills the entire temple and His glory fills the whole earth.

There is no doubt God’s revelation of Himself to Isaiah was awesome and terrifying. But I wonder if we are sheltered from being impacted so profoundly by reading Isaiah’s vision because of the society we live in. Our culture that has lost the note of God’s ultimate greatness and power.

We live in a culture that overlooks the glory of God displayed in the heavens because of light pollution. We mute the glory of God’s presence with human-generated noise and busyness. We shortchange true intimacy with God through the perversion of intimate relationships. We drown out the awe that comes from even the gift of life itself through the destruction of the unborn and daily exposure to violent acts in film, television, and gaming. No wonder people walk away from God; their spiritual sensitivities have been dulled. We have no room for a vision of God’s majesty that impacts every aspect of our lives.

When humans have no vision of the striking beauty of the holiness of God, we become like zombies, existing in flesh, but dead in spirit. We reject the Giver of life, refusing to see and experience Him in the ways He has clearly revealed Himself. Rather, we roam the surface of the earth, consuming and consuming, trying to make the deadness of our lives more tolerable.

ISAIAH RECOGNIZES HIS SIN IN LIGHT OF GOD’S HOLINESS

Once Isaiah was made aware of the wonder of God’s holiness, he came to a greater knowledge of himself and his nation. In short, he saw himself and his people against the backdrop of the glorious standard of God’s goodness. Watch how he responded:

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5)

Isaiah was filled with both awe and terror. In recognizing the purity and goodness of God, he came to see his own lack of goodness—his uncleanness and sin. Even more importantly, he recognized that he was ruined in light of God’s holiness.

In our culture, some people confuse “cleanness” with a list of do’s and don’ts. In this way, a godly life gets reduced to self-righteous rule keeping. But other folks excuse anything and everything, so that nothing is considered unclean or evil. Isaiah’s vision strikes at the self-righteous rule-keeper as well as the moral relativist. Unless we have a proper vision of our sin, we will fail to understand the essential need for God’s forgiveness and grace in Jesus Christ. We will have no moment when we recognize we are unclean in the presence of God’s goodness and holiness, and cry out to Him.
Isaiah’s vision gives us the prologue to the gospel: We must realize what we are as sinful human beings in contrast to the glorious nature of God. Only then can we too receive the redemption that God alone can provide.

**ISAIAH RECEIVES GRACE AND IS SENT ON MISSION**

So far, we have seen how Isaiah’s vision showcased the glory and holiness of the Lord. We’ve also seen how inadequate and unclean Isaiah felt in the presence of such moral purity. Now, we see how God responds to Isaiah’s confession of his sin.

*Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” (Isa. 6:6-8)*

In the next scene of Isaiah’s vision, an angel of the Lord took a burning coal from the altar. The imagery of the altar is important. On earth, the priests performed the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, but here, the heavenly messengers performed the imagery-laden ritual of the removal of sin.

It is interesting to note that Isaiah never pleaded with God. Nor did he beg for God to show him mercy. He did not attempt to strike a bargain with the Lord. Rather, the atonement was an act of God’s sheer grace in response to Isaiah’s confession of his sinfulness. There was nothing magical about coal that could deal with the sinful condition of Isaiah’s heart. It was a sign of God’s mercy and forgiveness, of God’s good gift of redemption.

The imagery of the altar and the burning coals of the sacrifice would have been familiar to Isaiah. The perfectly good justice of God that would bring His wrath on Isaiah’s sin had been satisfied, and as a result, Isaiah would not immediately suffer the consequence of his sin—death.

**99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES**

**God is Holy**

*God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for holy means separate or set apart. God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.*
The Lord did not intend to destroy Isaiah; rather He intended to redeem Isaiah, to establish relationship with him, and to use him greatly to serve others. In these last verses, the Lord revealed something more of his intention with Isaiah. He had given Isaiah a vision of His holiness and glory, from which Isaiah experienced self-despair. Isaiah's despair produced a confession that brought him the forgiveness of God's grace and mercy. The forgiveness of God provided an opportunity for service. These experiences came together in a final offering of Isaiah's life in service to God.

CHRIST CONNECTION

As a response to Isaiah's vision of God's holiness, we should stand in awe of the glory of God, manifested in all His attributes. Once we see ourselves for who we are in light of who God has shown Himself to be, we are undone in our sin and uncleanness. But thankfully, we serve a God who restores and commissions us through the sacrifice of His Son. The holiness and love of God meet at the cross, where Christ laid down His life for us.

Where does that leave us now? With the forgiveness we have in Christ, we lift our hands and say, “Here I am! Send me.” We seek to spread the awe and wonder of God’s glory and grace to those around us. We do so, fully acknowledging the risk that people will reject the beauty, power, and goodness of the Lord in favor of a ruined vision of their own making. But we believe that the Author of life will shine His light through us and lead to the salvation of others—people captivated by the beauty and power of God’s absolute goodness, which transcends this present world.
GROUP QUESTIONS

God’s Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

• Like Isaiah, what have you witnessed that reflects the power, majesty, and beauty of God? How did that affect you? Answers will vary.

• Why do you suppose that we, as a culture, often lack awe and wonder? What are some ways believers can enhance our vision of God's glory and holiness? One reason we often lack awe and wonder is because we over-entertain ourselves with the latest gadgets, games, and social media, drowning out even the possibility for something else to grasp our attention. One way to fight this would be to lay these distractions down and look to Jesus by getting into God’s Word, living in biblical community with others, spending quality time in prayer, and so forth.

• As with Isaiah, why is it important to not only recognize our own sinfulness, but to also confess and admit that sinfulness before God? Confession of sin is important because it means (1) that you recognize your sinfulness and guilt before God and (2) that you admit that your sin deserves punishment. Ultimately, confession is an act of humility and dependence, where we find ourselves completely at God’s mercy as we cry out to Him for forgiveness and grace.

• When Isaiah encountered God, it changed His life forever. Share the ways your own encounter and relationship with God has changed you. Answers will vary.
It is clear throughout the Bible that death is the proper consequence for sin, as seen most clearly in Paul's letter to the Romans (6:23). Isaiah fully realized this. In fact, he was certain death would result after he realized the depths of his own sin in light of the obvious goodness and holiness of God. It was a devastating realization, one that lead to a confessional cry to God.

- Why do you think most people don't see sin as deserving of death? Primarily because they don't understand sin for what it truly is, and they do not truly understand the God who is offended by it.
- Isaiah saw sin as an infinite offense against a holy God, and as a result, he felt ruined. How does seeing God accurately contribute to seeing our sin rightly? When we see God rightly, we not only see His holiness and perfection, but also how far short we fall from that perfect standard.

The uncleanness Isaiah experienced was not something was primarily on the outside, but the inside—his character. Jesus taught that what is in the heart of a person is what comes forth from the lips, for it is the heart of a person that defiles (Matt. 15:18-20). Here we see Isaiah's expression of that same teaching. Isaiah thought he was going to die, not because he forgot to keep a laundry list of rules, but because he recognized that his heart was so far away from the goodness of God.

- What is the difference between keeping a list of moral rules and conforming to the character of Christ? The former attempts to earn favor with God through self-effort, where the latter recognizes that it is only through the transforming work of God in the heart of a person that real life change can take place.
- How can you be more mindful about pursuing a heart like God's in the weeks ahead? Answers will vary.

You have likely heard Isaiah's response of “Here I am! Send me” used in church to support missions and evangelism. However, it is helpful to remember what preceded his statement: an awesome experience with the living Lord. Now, this doesn't mean that unless we have the same type of experience as Isaiah, we cannot be on mission with God. Yet it does mean that when we seek to be in fellowship with God and see Him for who He truly is, we will be more passionate and engaging in our conversations with others when it comes to belief in God.

- Why should forgiveness compel and motivate us to be God's messengers? If we truly understand our sin and what it cost to have our sins forgiven, our natural response would be to tell others.
- Give an example of this happening in your own life. Answers will vary.
LEADER PACK
For this session, refer students to pack item #5, which contains a quote poster related to the session.

SOURCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Check out the following additional resources:
- Leader Training Videos
- One Conversations
- Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron)
- Circular Timeline Poster
- App (for both leader and student)

Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject