

SPRING 2026

YOW[®]

GOD IS:
UNDERSTANDING THE
CHARACTER OF GOD

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SEIZE THE DAY:
EMBRACING A MISSION
WITH PURPOSE





A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

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On our own, human beings really don't have a big enough brain to understand anything about who God is or what God is like. Left to our own devices, humans could easily make God in our own image and make Him into the kind of God we want.

That's where grace comes in.

God's grace is such that He makes Himself known. Scripture teaches us that "what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them" (Rom. 1:19).

God isn't playing hide and seek with us. He has revealed His attributes (a word that just means "what God is like") in two ways.

The first is through what He has made. But that knowledge is also limited. We can't have a relationship with God simply by observing nature.

That's why God reveals His character not just by what He made, but also by what He wrote. He has

given us the Bible, and the Bible is filled cover to cover with information about who God is, what God loves, what God hates, and what God's like.

In these next seven sessions, we will explore God's attributes as they are revealed in His Word.

*Holy
Love
Just
Omnipotent
Faithful
Life-Giving
Eternal*

However, let me give you a word of warning, this study isn't just information, **it's transformation.**

This study should transform the way you think, talk and act. Once you really understand who God is, you will never be the same. "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children" (Eph. 5:1).

SESSION 1

GOD IS HOLY

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

THE POINT:

GOD IS SET APART FROM
EVERYTHING ELSE AND
DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

PSALM 99:1-9

¹ The LORD reigns! Let the peoples tremble. He is enthroned between the cherubim. Let the earth quake.

² The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted above all the peoples.

³ Let them praise your great and awe-inspiring name. He is holy.

.....
⁴ The mighty King loves justice. You have established fairness; you have administered justice and righteousness in Jacob.

⁵ Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his footstool. He is holy.

.....
⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests; Samuel also was among those calling on his name. They called to the LORD and he answered them.

⁷ He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees and the statutes he gave them.

⁸ LORD our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their sinful actions.

⁹ **Exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Cherubim (v. 1)—A “cherub” was a winged angel who functioned primarily as a guard. “Cherubim” is the plural form of cherub.

Holy (v. 5)—Verses 1-3, mention the greatness of God and His awe-inspiring name. In verses 4-5, the holiness of God describes His sovereign reign characterized by justice,

fairness, and righteousness. God is holy in His character and in His actions.

Holy Mountain (v. 9)—Most certainly this is a reference to the temple, based upon the earlier reference to Zion (v. 2). Worshipers had an invitation to worship at God’s holy temple, surrendering to His sovereignty.

WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS UNDERSTAND ABOUT GOD'S HOLINESS?

When my wife and I got married, we had two categories of dishes on our gift registry: everyday dishes and fine china place settings. Thirty-three years later, we continue to use our everyday dishes, well, every day. But the fine china sits on the top shelf. It is only for special occasions. Our wedding china has a pattern they don't even make anymore, so we must be very careful not to break it. The wedding silver has its own special wooden case. It is set apart.

I can't remember the last time we used our wedding china. In fact, I'm not even sure what the pattern looks like. Still, there it sits on the top shelf just in case the president drops by.

The paradox with God is that He is to be set apart like fine china, but He is anything but fragile. He is more precious than the finest silver, but He expects us to involve Him in our everyday lives. He doesn't want to only be present at special occasions; He wants to be there for every meal.

God Is Set Apart in His Greatness // Psalm 99:1-3

While many of the psalms indicate who wrote them, Psalm 99 is not one of them. Nor can we say with certainty the original setting for it. We have some clues, though. The references to Zion (v. 2) and to worshiping God at "His holy mountain" (v. 9) suggest that this psalm was intended to be used in worship at the temple in Jerusalem. Notice that even though God is great in Zion (another name for Jerusalem), He is exalted over all peoples. He does not have limited jurisdiction, and His worship can't be contained to one specific place. In fact, God Himself can't be contained.

This reminds me of the prophet Isaiah, who was an eyewitness to the greatness of God: "He saw the LORD seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of His robe filled the temple. Seraphim were standing above Him. And one called to another:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies; His glory fills the whole earth" (Isa. 6:1-3).

In our culture, we need to have a reminder that we are meant to tremble before the Lord. In fact, the peoples of the earth are commanded to tremble (v. 1). In the Old Testament, trembling was usually in response to God's wrath. But in this psalm, it has more to do with awe in the face of God's sovereignty ("the LORD reigns"). In either case, we dare not approach Him indifferently or flippantly.



THE POINT: GOD IS SET APART FROM EVERYTHING ELSE AND DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

When the psalmist described the Lord enthroned between the cherubim, the very earth was commanded to quake.

Along with fear and trembling, the statement “the LORD reigns” should also fill us with peace and confidence. God’s sovereignty is absolute, and no matter how chaotic and out of control the world may seem, God is still on His throne, and the Lord still reigns.

Cherubim were mighty angelic beings. Valentine’s Day cards really get it wrong in their depictions of cherubim. They are not cute and cuddly “baby angels,” armed only with a bow and arrows with heart-shaped tips. On the contrary, the cherubim charged with guarding the entrance to the garden of Eden were armed with “the flaming, whirling sword” (Gen. 3:24).

Translations vary as to the position of God’s throne relative to the cherubim. Some say He is between the cherubim. Others say above or upon. Upon is consistent with the vision Ezekiel had of God seated on His throne and supported by cherubim. Whichever direction the cherubim moved, the throne moved with them (Ezek. 1:26). This reemphasizes the idea that God’s greatness and majesty can’t be confined to a single geographic location!

There are two theological concepts we need to know to help us grasp Psalm 99. The first is transcendence. The second is immanence, but we’ll talk about that one in verses 6–9. What is transcendence? It is the “set apartness” of God. It’s the idea that God is above and beyond the created world. He exists outside of space and time, He is wholly other from creation, and His ways are beyond human understanding. Transcendence focuses on God’s sovereignty (v. 1) and greatness (v. 3). Another word for transcendence is holiness. Verse 3 is the first of four times Psalm 99 uses the word “holy” (vv. 3, 5, 9).

How are we to respond to God’s holiness? First, we respond with reverent, respectful, humble fear: “Let the peoples tremble” (v. 1). Second, we respond with glad and joyful praise and worship: “Let them praise Your great and awe-inspiring name” (v. 3). The greatness of God both deserves and demands awestruck wonder.

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN AWED BY THE GREATNESS OF GOD?

God Is Set Apart in His Justice // Psalm 99:4-5

Much has been said in the past few years about the justice system in the United States of America. We often hear questions raised about whether anyone is above the law. Is there a multi-tiered justice system in which one person is punished less severely (or not at all) than another person convicted of the same crime? Has the justice system been used as a tool of political retribution?



DIGGING DEEPER ACCESS TO THE THRONE

Psalm 99 is the sixth of the enthronement psalms, also known as the royal psalms. Psalms 93 and 95–100 were written to magnify the sovereign rule of God. Like Psalms 93 and 97, Psalm 99 opens with “The LORD reigns.” It describes God’s throne as: an exalted throne, a just throne, and a gracious throne. In the Old Testament, no one could approach God’s throne. Only the high priest could go into the holy place once a year and mediate between the Lord and His people. Today, Jesus Christ is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). Access to God’s throne is available to His children through Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:19–25). To the lost sinner, God’s throne is a place of judgment. To the believer, it is a throne of grace (Heb. 4:14–16). God not only invites believers to approach His throne but to do it with confidence. This confidence should filter through reverence and humility. Our confidence rests fully in our position in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22).

What can keep us from confidently drawing near to God?



Regardless of how you answer these questions, the fact that we are asking them in the first place shows that two things are certain. First, we all want justice and fairness, or at least we think we do. Second, we don't always see justice served, or at least we think we don't.

Another translation of verse 4 is "The might of a king is his love of justice."¹ In other words, a love of justice is what makes a king mighty in the first place.

This is how we know verse 4 refers to God and not a human king. Throughout history, human kings have been notorious for abusing their authority to suit their own self-interest. The Bible, particularly 2 Kings, is filled with stories of kings who manipulated, oppressed, enslaved, and even slaughtered whoever got in the way of what they wanted, even if it was a citizen of their own kingdom.

We humans long for justice and fairness. If you doubt that, the next time you are on a road trip count how many billboards for lawyers you pass in an hour! But do we really want justice and fairness when it comes to our own sin? The Bible shows us that the just penalty for our sins is death (Rom. 6:23). But God in His mercy does not deal "with us as our sins deserve" (Ps. 103:10). Instead, He sent His one and only Son to pay the penalty for our sins. Was that just? Yes! The penalty was paid. Jesus paid the debt we could never pay. But was that fair, that we didn't have to pay for our sins? No. Praise God, we are the beneficiaries of His grace and mercy.

HOW IS GOD'S JUSTICE DIFFERENT FROM EARTHLY JUSTICE?

What is our response to God's justice and mercy? The only proper response is to "exalt the LORD our God; bow in worship at his footstool" (v. 5). We kneel. We bow in humility. There is no other appropriate posture when we encounter God's sovereignty, His justice, and His righteousness.

God Is Set Apart in His Actions // Psalm 99:6-9

In verses 1–3, we talked about how God is transcendent. He is set apart, over and above all creation. Yet God is also immanent. Immanence refers to God's closeness and presence within His creation. It emphasizes that He is actively involved in the world and in the lives of individuals.

In verses 6–9, the psalmist identified three examples of people who "called to the LORD, and He answered them" (v. 6). All three were mediators between God and human beings. They interceded with Him on behalf of the people—Moses as the deliverer of the Exodus, Aaron as the first Levitical priest, and Samuel as the first prophet.

During the Exodus, the children of Israel had a constant visual reminder of God's immanence. God "spoke to them in a pillar of cloud" by day (v. 7) and led them with a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21). There was never a time, day or night, when the people were not assured of His presence. In the Gospels, Jesus Himself is the visible manifestation of God's presence. Matthew 1:22–23 reminds us that one of the names of Jesus is Immanuel, which means "God with us." Immanent and Immanuel come from the same root word.

Verses 7–8 may seem to be in conflict, if not contradictory. Verse 7 says God spoke to those who "kept His decrees and the statutes He gave them." Obedience is a prerequisite for hearing God speak. But verse 8 says that He was "an avenger of their sinful actions." There is no contradiction here. Instead, this is a clear picture of how God interacts with His people. Because He is actively involved in the world and in the lives of individuals, He can and does punish sin. Remember that God loves justice. Even those in Scripture who spoke with Him face

THE POINT: GOD IS SET APART FROM EVERYTHING ELSE AND DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

to face had to deal with the consequences of their sinful actions. The clearest example is when Moses and Aaron failed to obey His instructions and honor His holiness. As a result, they were kept from entering the promised land (Num. 20:1–13).

Still, the psalmist described God as “a forgiving God to them” (v. 8). His discipline is a sign of His love for us, not the absence of it. Every loving parent will discipline a child who is doing something that could harm themselves or others, and God, the most perfect Parent of all, is no exception. When we confess and repent, He will always forgive our sin, even if He does not reverse the consequences our sin sets in motion. In Christ, we see both God’s punishment of sin and His forgiveness of sinners.

Verse 9 is nearly identical to verse 5, with a call to exalt and worship the Lord while acknowledging His holiness. In verse 5, we worship at His “footstool” in humility. In verse 9, however, we are invited to worship at His “holy mountain.” Just as He invited Moses to come up to Him (Ex. 19:20), He invites us. Through Jesus, God has made Himself accessible to us. He is transcendent, but He is also immanent. Hallelujah!

IN WHAT WAYS DO GOD’S ACTIONS LEAD YOU TO RESPOND IN WORSHIP?

DID YOU KNOW?

“Come as you are, but in Christ you can’t stay as you are” is a popular phrase used in many Christian churches as a welcoming invitation to worship with believers in Christ. The phrase is meant to debunk the lie that you must “get yourself together” before you come to Christ. The truth is, Jesus knows our sinful nature: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Jesus willingly gave His life and rose from the dead so that we may have a relationship with our holy Father.

God is holy, and His holiness affects every aspect of His nature. Because He is holy, He expects His children to be holy (1 Pet. 1:16). We cannot stay as we are. God knows we cannot obey this command in our own strength. So, He fills us with His Holy Spirit, who enables us to be transformed into His likeness.

Biblical Truth: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession . . .” (1 Pet. 2:9).

How will knowing God chose you to be holy impact your daily living?

LIVE IT

How can you cultivate a heart of worship that reflects reverence and confidence in who God is?

Who can be compared to our God? God is completely distinct from all of His creation, and every attribute He possesses is rooted in holiness. Yet, He is willing to dwell with His people and extend His grace to us. He invites us to draw near so He can receive our worship. Here are some ways to draw near to the holy God this week:

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- **Praise.** This week, tune out the podcasts, talk radio, and your favorite oldies, and make a playlist of songs that emphasize the holiness of God. When you’re stuck in traffic or doing chores, praise Him! Remember, God is set apart, but He is also right there with you.
- **Obey.** Are you living some area of your life in disobedience to God? Confess it and repent, and trust you’ll hear God’s voice more clearly.
- **Intercede.** Just as Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were intercessors between God and man, pray this week for your lost friends and family.

DAILY READINGS

1. EXALTED! // PSALM 99:1-5

The holiness of God stands exalted as the center of His divine essence, humbling you with the weight of your weakness and filling you with awe at His matchless beauty. His complete sinlessness reveals both your need for grace and the hope that He can transform your broken heart into something beautiful. Because this holy God passionately loves justice, He is actively working to make all things right in your life. Understanding His holiness draws you closer to Him.

The God who is too pure to compromise is also too loving to forsake or leave you.

2. I EXALT THEE IS MY TESTIMONY // PSALM 99:6-7

Be encouraged, believer, for the holy God, exalted above all creation in endless majesty, gives ear with loving compassion to hear your every cry. His excellent holiness doesn't create distance—it draws you into deeper intimacy with Him. From His throne of glory, the sovereign Lord shows that your prayers matter deeply—not because you are worthy, but because His holiness makes Him perfectly faithful to His covenant love. As you grasp that the same God worshiped by angels is personally involved and invested in your daily struggles and joys, you understand both His brilliant greatness and your valued place as His beloved child.

God is holy in character and will respond with perfect wisdom and love.

3. RESPONSE AND REVERENCE // PSALM 99:8-9

God's holiness reveals itself most profoundly in His ways of forgiveness—where His perfect purity becomes the very pathway through which your guilt is cleansed. His holiness isn't a barrier to your relationship; it's the basis of it. This same holy God who offers you grace also judges misconduct with justice, proving that His forgiveness isn't just permission but His grace secured through the cross. From His exalted throne, where you are invited to approach boldly, you encounter

something beautiful and amazing—the God whose holiness should grip you with fear has made a way for intimate communion. This understanding draws you closer to Him for response and reverence, knowing that His justice was satisfied not by your punishment but by His own sacrifice.

Oh, come, let us worship Him!

4. OBEDIENT LOVE // JOHN 15:9-11

When you are connected to God's love and joy through obedience, submission becomes a pathway—not a burden—to experiencing His deepest affections. Obedience becomes the conduit through which His love flows freely into your life, transforming duty into delight as you align with His heart and receive His abundant joy. As you choose to trust and obey, even in difficulty, you deepen your understanding of both His character and your identity. You are not just a servant following orders but a beloved child learning to walk in harmony with your Father's perfect will. Obedient love means discovering that God's commands are not restrictions but invitations into the fullness of His love and the completeness of His joy.

To know Him, is to love and trust Him.

5. PROVING LOVE // JOHN 15:12

God's love isn't just an emotion—it's a powerful, active force that moves, serves, and expresses care in tangible ways. It proves itself by doing, not simply feeling. The same love that led God to give His Son now lives within you, seeking expression through kindness, service, and sacrifice. As you recognize this stirring in your heart, you begin to understand: you're not just a recipient of divine love—you're a vessel through which it flows. Your identity is both deeply loved and naturally loving. Growing closer to God means allowing His love to shape your actions, reflect through your words, and move through your hands and heart.

God's love doesn't lie dormant; it transforms you and reaches others through you.

SESSION 2

GOD IS LOVE

Leader pages on pp. 106-109

THE POINT:
WE CAN ONLY TRULY
KNOW LOVE BY
KNOWING GOD.

1 JOHN 4:7-19

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice, for our sins.

.....
¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.

¹⁴ And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world's Savior.

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God.

.....
¹⁶ And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

¹⁷ In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love.

¹⁹ **We love because he first loved us.**

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Love (v. 7)—John encouraged an agape-type love; (v. 7) an exhortation to love, (v. 11) a statement of the duty to love, and (v. 12) a condition of God's presence within the believer.

"... Seen God" (v. 12)—No person at any time has ever seen God in His unveiled essence, glory, and majesty. The love of

God in offering His Son, is one of the greatest pictures of the fullness of God that we can see in this lifetime.

Given His Spirit (v. 13)—At the moment of salvation, God permanently places His Spirit in believers. If anyone does not have the Spirit of God, he does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9).

BEFORE YOU TEACH

Meet the Author

The author of Psalm 99 is David. Find a free PDF of an Alphabox template online and make several copies. Have the learners fill in the boxes, listing everything they know about David from A to Z. Then, allow them to talk with others, adding new information to their boxes. Finally, show a brief video clip from YouTube on David's life. After the video and at the close of the session, invite learners to fill in the blank boxes, listing what they have learned about him.

Experience Personal Growth

Read the article "How Does God's Holiness Call Us to Holiness?" from Lifeway Research. Note any information that stands out to you or that you may need to take a closer look at later. Share the article with your group prior to class as an introduction to this session. Allow time in your group to discuss the article and share as you discuss God's holiness this week.

LOOK BACK

Remind learners of the last session from the previous study, "When Doing God's Work Is Interrupted." Share that He may interrupt us to move our ministry in a different direction. Explain that instead of being frustrated or reluctant to change, we should remain open to new directions, follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and expect God to open new ways for ministry. Prompt learners to discuss how the Lord's interruptions have positively impacted their ministry.

TEACHING PLAN

INTRODUCTION

DO: Prior to class, prepare 5 compare/contrast charts and hang them around the room. For each chart, select 2 different people from the following categories: basketball, football, music, movies, and television shows. Group learners in teams of 3

and prompt them to use sticky notes to complete the charts as they enter class. Guide them to switch charts every 3 minutes. Lead a whole group discussion after 15 minutes.

ASK: "Who is the G.O.A.T.?"

TRANSITION: Read **The Point:** "God is set apart from everything else and deserves our worship."

PACK ITEM: Display **Pack Item 1**, the "God Is: Understanding the Character of God" poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the focus of each session.

DIG INTO THE TEXT

God Is Set Apart in His Greatness // Psalm 99:1-3

PACK ITEM: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 2**, "The Holiness of God" handout, to introduce this lesson and help the group understand the holiness of God.

READ: Call for a learner to read Psalm 99:1-3.

EXPLAIN: The Hebrew term for the term reign is *malak*. It means to fill the functions of ruler over someone. The chapter opens by letting us know that the Lord is over everyone and everything. The term tremble and the phrase "earth quake" are used in the opening verse.

ASK: "What is it like when a person or place experiences an earthquake?"

EXPLAIN: The phrase "enthroned between the cherubim" refers to the ark of the covenant, where His presence resides. This further illustrates His kingship. Because He is exalted above everyone, He deserves our worship and praise. Inquire: "What comes to mind when you hear the term worship?"

GUIDE: Verse 3 lets us know that His name is awe-inspiring. Use the commentary (p. 104) to further explain this idea.

EMPHASIZE: Inform learners that we don't worship the Lord out of fear but out of reverence.

THE POINT: GOD IS SET APART FROM EVERYTHING ELSE AND DESERVES OUR WORSHIP.

DO: Pass out the lyrics to “Holy Forever” by Chris Tomlin. Guide learners to annotate the lyrics and note what stands out to them about the song, paying particular attention to how the song connects to the first three verses. After a few minutes, lead a whole class discussion the responses. Lyrics that stand out:

- Your name is the highest/Your name is the greatest/ Your name stands above them all
- And the angels cry holy/All creation cries holy/You are lifted high, holy/Holy forever.

DIGGING DEEPER: Point learners to the “Digging Deeper” (p. 13), on “Access to the Throne” and discuss. Ask the question that follows.

God Is Set Apart in His Justice // Psalm 99:4-5

SAY: “Verses 4-5 continue to highlight the Lord’s holiness.”

READ: Enlist a reader to read Psalm 99:4-5.

DISCUSS: Verse 4 opens by stating that God loves justice and has established fairness. Use the commentary (p. 105), to further explain this verse.

ASK: “How can we worship God for His justice when the world is so unjust?”

DO: Provide learners with a list of Bible verses about justice:

- Deuteronomy 10:17-18
- Psalm 9:7-8
- Psalm 33:5
- Isaiah 5:16
- Isaiah 30:18
- Jeremiah 9:24

GUIDE: Allow learners to work with a partner for this activity. Instruct pairs to choose a different verse so that there will be variety in your discussion. Ask learners to go to that verse and read it along with a few surrounding verses to deepen their understanding of the verse. Give them time to note all observations and/or questions they discover about God’s justice.

After about 10 minutes, pull the class back together and hold a discussion about their observations and questions.

GUIDE: Use the commentary (p. 106), to explain that God has administered justice and righteousness in Jacob. Underscore: Verse 5 charges us to exalt the Lord. We often hear and see this term, but be certain learners know what it means.

God Is Set Apart in His Actions // Psalm 99:6-9

READ: Invite a learner to read Psalm 99:6-9.

EXPLAIN: Moses and Aaron were brothers who played crucial roles in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. God chose Moses to be the leader, but Moses expressed concern about his inability to speak. Thus, Aaron served as his spokesperson and priest, relaying God’s messages to Pharaoh and the Israelites. Samuel is known for his close relationship with God, hearing God’s voice directly and facilitating divine communication. He was the last judge of Israel who anointed both Saul and David as kings, initiating a significant change in the structure of Israel’s leadership.

ASK: “According to verses 6-7, how did Moses, Aaron, and Samuel demonstrate their reverence to God? How did God respond?”

EMPHASIZE: They called on the name of the Lord and kept the commands He gave them.

DISCUSS: Lead a discussion about the readings.

ASK: “What do we learn about God’s holiness in each of these instances?”



PACK ITEM 1



PACK ITEM 2



OBJECT LESSON

DO: Bring a step ladder and place it at the front of the class. Then, step on it as you address the class.

ASK: "How many of you have a ladder in your home? What is the purpose of this ladder?"

SAY: We use a step ladder to lift ourselves up to retrieve or reach the things we wouldn't otherwise be able to reach.

EXPLAIN: Whether literally or figuratively speaking, we know how to lift ourselves up if needed. Verses 5 and 9 charge us to exalt the Lord our God. In other words, we should raise or elevate Him above all else.

CHALLENGE: This week when you pull out that step ladder to raise yourself up, let this serve as a reminder to lift our holy God up.

CLOSE THE SESSION

SUMMARIZE: Review the three session points. Direct learners to the "Live It" (p. 15), question and discuss ways to draw near to the holy God throughout this week.

EMPHASIZE: Because He is set apart, He deserves our worship. How we view God will determine how we honor and serve Him.

Close with Prayer

PRAY: "Holy God, give us a hunger and thirst for your Word so that we can learn of your holiness. Cause our view of you to increase so that we will worship you for who you are. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen."

COMMENTARY

PSALM 99:1-3

Connection to The Point: God is set apart in His greatness.

Verse 1. The Lord reigns. This phrase is a hallmark of the royal psalms (Pss. 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). Using the name of God, Yahweh, the psalmist pointed to the primary responsibility of a king—reigning over his people. The noun that is based on the verb "reigns" means "king" (*melek* in Hebrew). Used as a verb, reigning implied exercising authority and sovereign power over one's subjects. Psalm 99 expresses the response to this sovereignty with the phrase, "Let the peoples tremble."

The cherubim. Kings have thrones, and the psalmist indicated that Yahweh was "enthroned between the cherubim." A "cherub" was a winged angel who functioned primarily as a guard or attendant. "Cherubim" was the plural form of "cherub."

Verse 2. Zion is merely a transliteration of the Greek and Hebrew words that referred to the fortified hill of pre-Israelite Jerusalem. It could have referred to the Arabic term interpreted as "mountainous ridge." The Bible first names the area of Jerusalem as Zion at the time of David's conquest. It could refer to the whole city of Jerusalem, but it could also refer only to the temple built by Solomon. The holiness of God, a term indicating what makes Him unique, is that His Kingdom knows no boundaries and exalts itself above all of humanity.

Verse 3. *Great and awe-inspiring name.* God's "name," implying who He is, and all His character is "great." This is something large or prominent. His name is also "awe-inspiring." Deuteronomy 10:17 describes God as One who inspires respect and fear. This is not a negative type of fear but one that recognizes the identity of God as King.

Holy. Though this word sometimes evokes images of something mystical or unexplainable, the idea of God's holiness is that He is different

from the world that He created. Many kings have ruled upon the earth since God's creation, but no reign is like His reign.

PSALM 99:4-5

Connection to The Point: God is set apart in His justice.

Verse 4. From a human perspective, kingly power often corrupts. God's rule as King always includes an ethical foundation grounded in what is right and what is fair. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Pss. 89:14; 97:2). The Hebrew word for "justice" (*mishpat*) often represented the correct understanding of how a government should relate to its subjects. Justice, at its core, finds its source in God's sovereignty.

The Hebrew word for "fairness" (*mesarim*) came from the root of the verb that meant to "go straight" or "walk in the most direct way." It came to mean doing the right thing. When people kept the God's law or walked in the Lord's ways, they did so with fairness. "Justice" and "fairness" form the character of God's sovereign reign.

Verse 5. When used in a non-religious sense, the word "exalt" meant something great in height. When used of humanity, it indicated a haughty heart (Deut. 8:14), pride (Ezek. 31:10), or lofty eyes (Ps. 131:1). However, when used of God it referred to His lofty stature in comparison with humanity. Worship is a person's response to the loftiness of God, and to exalt Him is to acknowledge His sovereignty in our lives and in the world.

"Worship" involves lifting God on high and lowering ourselves in His presence. The idea of prostrating oneself was a cultural gesture of respect, worship, and submission to someone in greater authority. This pair of words perfectly describes worship—that which humbles oneself before God and lifts Him to the highest place of authority in one's life.

God encouraged a posture of humility and devotion as His worshipers assembled at the "footstool" of His throne. He asked the nations to worship at His footstool, which in 1 Chronicles 28:2 and Psalm 132:7 referred to His

temple. Isaiah described heaven as God's throne and earth as His footstool (Isa. 66:1). Whether forced or voluntary, all will bow in surrender to the sovereignty of God (Phil. 2:9-11).

PSALM 99:6-9

Connection to The Point: God is set apart in His actions toward us.

Verse 6. Moses interceded in his role of a priest for the nation of Israel. After the nation had worshiped a golden calf, Moses prayed that God would not destroy the nation. God hears the intercessory prayers of His people. Aaron also acted on behalf of the nation of Israel. When the nation rebelled against Moses, God sent a plague upon the people. Aaron took a fire pan with fire from the altar of God and added incense, representing prayer on behalf of the people (Num. 16:46-50). The term "priests" in this verse refers loosely to those who prayed for the nation of Israel. Priests stood between the Lord and the people of Israel, praying for the nation. Divine sovereignty operates in perfect union with the prayers of His people.

Verse 7. A *pillar of cloud* is a reference to the visible presence of the Lord among His covenant people. The pillar of cloud guided them as they traveled by day and a pillar of fire by night throughout the exodus (Ex. 13:21-22).

Verse 8. All three of the intercessors prayed for God's forgiveness toward Israel, whether for worshiping a golden calf or for requesting a human king to rule over them. God heard the intercessors and acted on behalf of His people.

Verse 9. The "holy" God welcomed sinners to acknowledge His sovereignty and worship at "his holy mountain." Most certainly this is a reference to the temple, based upon the earlier reference to Zion (v. 2). Also on Zion was the place where God sacrificed His own Son on a cross. Under the new covenant, we come to the cross as a place of surrender and a place of worship.

Note: Additional commentary can be found at you.lifeway.com.

GOD IS: UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

The world is overrun with religions, philosophies, and personal opinions regarding the nature and character of God. Left to our own devices, we typically make God in our own image and make Him into the kind of God we want. We are not left to figure God out on our own. Through the Bible, God has revealed Himself to us. Through the revelation of Scripture—and His ultimate revelation through Jesus Christ—we can see exactly who God is. And when we see Him, we are drawn to worship Him.

SEIZE THE DAY: EMBRACING A MISSION WITH PURPOSE

Deepening one's relationship with Jesus is wonderful in itself, but it doesn't stop there! With that relationship comes a charge, a mission to carry out. It's a privilege we've been given to walk with Christ and take His gospel to our neighbors, our community, and the world. Through the book of Acts, we see the example from the early church of what it looks like to joyously embrace the mission.

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