



The first study is a half study to give more time for explaining what will happen and for people to get to know one another. Below are some possibilities of how to start the evening.

Introductions:

- We suggest having name tags for everyone.
- Have everyone share a bit about themselves.
- Have everyone share how they came to your church.
- Have everyone share a bit about their spiritual background.

Sample questions:

Did they grow up going to church?

Did they stop going at some point?

Have they ever been to a church before?

Was their experience a negative or positive one?

- Teacher: Share the history and mission of your church.
Any questions regarding the church?
- Leaders share a bit of their spiritual journey

Growth Group Rules:

- All questions are allowed
- After three weeks we close the group off to new people:
To cultivate relational safety within the group.
After 3 weeks new people will have missed too much information

WHO IS GOD?

If God exists, then what do you think he is like? What is the first characteristic that enters your mind? Why do you think that attribute came to your mind first?

Of all of God's attributes, which one do you think is the most significant in that it will influence all the others?

Many people will often refer to God's **love** as being the most significant. It is almost as though God is a big Grandpa in the sky who just warmly loves everyone. However, the Bible also refers to God's **wrath**. Take the story of Noah for instance. Civilization became so wicked and violent that eventually all righteousness would have been abandoned and life on earth become very short-lived (see Genesis 6). In order to save civilization God had to choose a wrathful response, judge evil and start over with Noah. He was the one man who had faith in God and desired to live righteously.

How can wrath and love work together?

They must be determined by some other overriding factor.

Isaiah 6:1-5 (NIV)

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

What characteristic does the seraphim see as being all significant?**God's holiness**

Holiness is the one attribute of God that influences all his other attributes.

In the English language if we want to emphasize something we often use the word "really", as in, "It was really big". We might even go so far as to say, "It was "really, really, big".

Likewise, in the Hebrew language if you want to **emphasize** something, you simply repeat the adjective. Here, the seraphim are not simply saying, "God is holy". They are not even saying, "God is holy, holy". They are saying, "God is holy, holy, holy". Do you get the sense they're trying to stress a point?

What does the word "holy" mean?**Holiness consists of two concepts:****1) Separate**

God, by his nature, is separate from anything created and from anything that is less than perfect. The opposite of that which is holy is that which is "common" or "earthly".

In the Old Testament, objects dedicated to him were also considered to be "holy" as they were made distinct from everything else and set apart for God, i.e. the priesthood – those members alone could enter the Holy Place of the tabernacle because they were declared holy by God and set apart from the others for his service. (Also: Ark of the Covenant, the temple utensils, etc.).



2) Moral Purity

To say God is holy means that he is completely righteous. There is no hint of sin or evil associated with him. Because he is holy, he can in no way embrace what is evil or sinful.

Matthew 5:48 (NIV) Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Why do you think Isaiah responds the way he does in verse 5?

When a person encounters the true holiness of God, he becomes distinctly aware of his own sinfulness. It induces an overwhelming sense of guilt, shame, and judgment. Our natural response is to want to retreat away from it – like bugs under a rock suddenly being exposed to the light.

Isaiah's response was to say he was "ruined" by that experience. **In what way was he ruined?**

Isaiah felt naked and exposed, as he stood before his holy God. He felt there was no possible way he, a sinner, could possibly survive such an encounter. We can never completely understand the full extent of our sinfulness, at least until we see the nature of true holiness.

Isaiah became painfully aware of his own sinfulness as he stood before the Holy God.

How would you define sin?

Sin is anything that does not reflect the holiness of God.

The actual Greek word has reference to the realm of **archery** when the arrow misses the target. Sin is compared to missing the target of God's glory and holiness. Anything that falls short of hitting the target of holiness is sin. We might think sins have varying degrees of severity, but from God's perspective, all sin is a moral rejection of him.

Where do you think these insights leave us with regard to our relationship with God?

Is it possible for God to accept and embrace us if we have sin in our lives?

Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy;
without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

SUMMARY:

What are the positive aspects of God's holiness?

God is good.
God can never be evil or do evil to you.
God can be trusted to do what is morally right in every situation.
You can trust God.

What is the negative side of God's holiness with regard to us?

God cannot be united with evil.
If we have any sin in our lives we cannot be in a relationship with God or dwell with him through eternity.

Don't worry. Over the next few weeks we will resolve the tension and reveal God's solution to the problem of our sin.

What are some examples of times we tend to question the goodness or holiness of God?

Is there any concept from this study that might affect your perspective about God or self?

HOME STUDY:

Read: The Gospel of Luke: Chapters 1-12

In the New Testament there are four Gospels that each tell about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The word "gospel" simply means "good news". Each of these four authors are setting out to tell us the good news about Jesus Christ. Why do we need four accounts?

Picture a car accident that takes place at a busy intersection. On each corner of the intersection there is a person that witnesses the accident and then tells others about what he saw. Each person, because of their vantage point, will relate slightly different aspects of the story and, depending on who he is talking to, will tell the story stressing different points. One person is presenting his account to a police officer, another to a news reporter, another to his friends and family, and another to his church congregation as a sermon illustration. Each story will be a true account of what happened, but different aspects of the story will be stressed depending on the message the witness wants to convey and who he is addressing. The details one would tell to the police office would be very different than the details one would draw out for his friends.

The gospel authors are writing to different groups of people and, therefore, also have a different purpose for writing. Each narrative is complete for the purpose it was written, but when read together, they give us a much richer understanding of the person of Jesus and what he came to accomplish. Luke shares with us his motive for writing in the very first few verses (Luke 1:1-4).