

HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

STUDY TWO

The Holiness of God

Isaiah 6:1–8

It isn't spooky to talk about the holiness of God. It isn't so ethereal that you can't get your arms around it. It means God is separate from all the things that contaminate and aggravate and mark our lives. His being infinitely holy means that there is an infinite sense of purity.

—Charles R. Swindoll

HOLINESS—the trait of all of God's traits. The trait that exalts Him in glory and separates Him in purity. Theologian J. I. Packer describes it well:

When Scripture calls God, or individual persons of the Godhead, “holy” . . . the word signifies everything about God that sets him apart from us and makes him an object of awe, adoration, and dread to us. It covers all aspects of his transcendent greatness and moral perfection and thus is an attribute of all his attributes, pointing to the “Godness” of God at every point.¹

Few times in history has God pulled back the curtains of creation to unveil His raw, blazing holiness. Jacob saw the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:10–17). Moses felt the heat from the bush (Exodus 3:1–17). Peter, James, and John witnessed the transfiguration of the Son of God when “his face shone like the sun” (Matthew 17:2). In this study, we enter another one of those scenes which occurred nearly twenty-eight hundred years ago to the young, unsuspecting Isaiah, who saw firsthand in the temple what the fiery seraphim did not dare behold.

Chuck Swindoll walks us through the iconic passage Isaiah 6:1–8 that we, too, might see the Holy One of Israel as Isaiah saw Him.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

We study the Bible that our minds might be renewed. We aim to think and live differently as God conforms us to the holy image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Like Paul said:

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2 NASB)

But this cannot happen without the Spirit generating in us life in place of death.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (8:11 NASB)

In light of Paul's statements in Romans, pray for the Spirit to strengthen you and transform your mind through this study.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Searching the Scriptures requires effort. Sometimes, intense effort as well as patience and perseverance. As Chuck writes, “The Bible does not yield its truth to lazy minds!”²

But how rewarding once we excavate spiritual gems that prove more precious than the priciest rubies hewn from rock. “This habit is indispensable for life and ministry. There is no substitute! Searching the Scriptures yields a richness in life unlike anything else.”³



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God expects us to live a holy life, and by that, I mean separate from the thinking and life-style of our culture. We live in it, but we are not part of it. —Chuck Swindoll



Observation: Thinking like a Seraphim

Begin by mulling over *Isaiah 6:1–8*. Step slowly through the text. Don't run through it. Let Isaiah's shock and awe become your shock and awe.

When did Isaiah enter the temple, and why is this significant in view of his statement at the end of verse five? (Hint: notice what word is repeated.)

What did the seraphim do and say? How did their voices affect the temple (*Isaiah 6:2–4*)?

What did Isaiah confess as he witnessed such a magnificent scene? What happened after his confession (*6:5–7*)?



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What did the Lord say? How did Isaiah respond (Isaiah 6:8)?

For the rest of his life, Isaiah lived as a new man. In his mind's eye, he could still see the long train of God's robe. Isaiah could still smell the divine smoke that filled the temple. He could still hear the antiphonal praise from the thundering, seraphic voices that shook the temple's foundations. By God's grace, Isaiah preserved what he witnessed so that we can say with him centuries later, "I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies" (6:5).



Interpretation: Thinking like Isaiah

King Uzziah died in 740 BC. Even before then, the spiritual vitality of God's people was eroding. They bowed before the idols that littered their land (Isaiah 2:8). The rich decorated their houses "with things stolen from the poor" (3:14). And instead of mourning over their sin, they danced and feasted on meat and drank wine (22:13). Soon, powerful nations would "roar like lions," pounce on God's people, and "carry them off" (5:29). They needed a fresh vision of God and His power and a new hope in God's plan to restore their land.

Isaiah entered the temple Solomon had built nearly two hundred years prior to Uzziah's death. Cross reference [1 Kings 6:2](#) and note the dimensions of Solomon's temple. How big do you believe the Lord's robe must have been to fill it?



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Look up *seraphim* in your Bible dictionary, and describe the appearance of these angelic beings. What does their appearance and response to the Lord indicate about His holiness?

What does Isaiah's response to seeing the Lord indicate about the Lord's holiness?

According to Isaiah 6:7–8, why did Isaiah want to be sent as the Lord's messenger? Remember to consult a commentary if you need to.



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Using a commentary or dictionary, explain the significance of the seraphim's triple utterance of *holy*. Why did they say it three times? Where else do we find this word mentioned three times in the Bible? For a helpful online resource, go to netbible.org and consult Constable's Notes on Isaiah 6:3.

Isaiah volunteered. He had received the vision, renewal, and forgiveness and wanted to take it to God's people. The Lord accepted. But the people had hardened hearts, plugged ears, and blinded eyes (Isaiah 6:9–10) and were incapable of understanding how "the whole earth is filled with [God's] glory" (6:3). They needed the Divine Healer to perform radical surgery to soften their hearts, unstop their ears, and open their eyes. Only when God intercedes in a person's life can he or she begin to understand God's holiness.



Correlation: You Shall Be Holy, for I Am Holy

Peter walked with Jesus—God in the flesh, holiness veiled in human likeness. Yet, at times, Jesus allowed people to see His true nature. For example, when He told Peter to let down his fishnets for one more attempt at a catch, Peter reluctantly obeyed. The nets nearly broke they were so full, giving Peter insight into Jesus' identity and leading him to say words similar to Isaiah's: "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

Decades after Jesus resurrected, the veteran apostle Peter penned a letter to help Christians live in obedience to God. Look how Peter connected God's holiness to our own:

*So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."
(1 Peter 1:14–16)*



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According to Peter, must Christians be holy to become God's children, or are they to be holy because they are God's children? What is the difference between these two concepts, and why is it important to distinguish between them?

What are some things that prevent Christians from being holy?

We are to be authentic in an inauthentic world. To be honest in a dishonest culture. To model a wholesome life in the unwholesome contexts where we find ourselves. To be free of corruption, addiction, and compromise in a corrupt, addicted, and compromising society.
—Chuck Swindoll



Application: Living as Obedient Children

God's holiness compels us to action. It instructs us how to live as much as it informs us about God. For this reason, Chuck gives principles to help us live holy lives in our minds, mouths, and morals.



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In your mind, counteract depravity with godly thoughts. To paraphrase ancient philosopher Lao Tzu: thoughts become words, which become actions, which become habits, which become character.⁴ In what ways can you grow in holiness by maintaining godly thoughts?

In your mouth, free yourself from all unwholesome words. Slips of the tongue reveal the depths of the heart. That's what struck Isaiah as he heard the praises of the seraphim and then realized the filth of his mouth. What area or areas of life do you find yourself tempted to profanity or put-downs, lies or gossip, boasting or complaining? How can you better keep yourself free of unwholesome words (*Ephesians 4:29*)?

In your morals, guard yourself from every compromise. Political policies, business contracts, legal disputes—spheres of life where compromise finds acceptance. But not our character. We reflect and represent God Most High who is perfect and pure in all His ways. Do you already guard your character from compromise? If so, how? In what ways can you cultivate a pure character as God's image-bearer?



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It does no good to hide our depravity, deny our weaknesses, or ignore areas that tend toward erosion. God knows us exhaustively and delights in restoring us, forgiving our sins, and transforming our hearts. When that happens, we find ourselves saying with Isaiah a natural and fitting response: “Here I am, send me.”



A FINAL PRAYER

End this study by incorporating Chuck’s three principles above into a prayer, expressing your desire for holiness to Jesus who alone is worthy of our praise and honor.

ENDNOTES

1. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 43.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 17.
3. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures*, 16.
4. Lao Tzu, “Quotable Quote,” goodreads.com, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/8203490-watch-your-thoughts-they-become-your-words-watch-your-words>.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

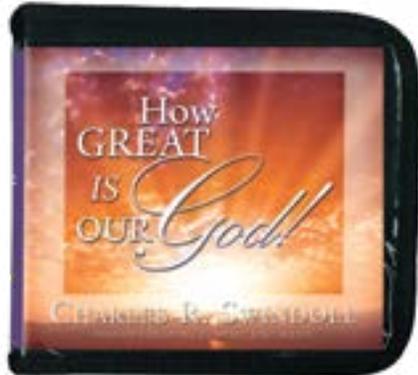
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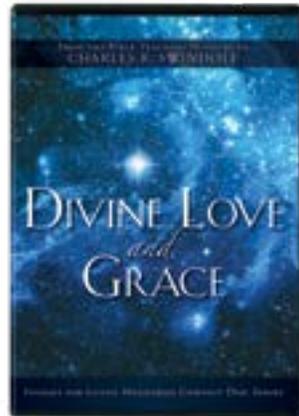
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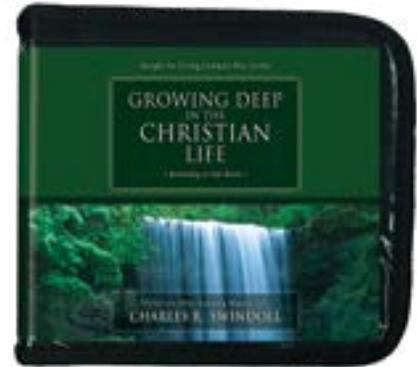
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For the 2019 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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