

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 1: Who is God? (Acts 17:16-34)¹

Big Idea: Paul’s speech to the Areopagus serves as a good starting point in thinking about who God is and what he is like.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) engage with the various views of God held by others; and (ii) have their own view of God shaped and informed by Paul’s speech in Acts 17.

Series Introduction²

Deuteronomy 29:29 states, “*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law*”.

As we commence this series of topical studies on who God is, this verse reminds us of three important truths.

Firstly, there are some things about God that we will never fully know – “*the secret things belong to the LORD our God*”. As we acknowledge that God is so much bigger and greater, wiser and more wonderful, than we can ever think or imagine we are to grow in our humility before him.

Secondly, this humility should not lead to despondency. Although we can never know all things about God we are able to know God and be known by him – “*the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever*”. God has graciously made himself known to us through his Word and through his Son and therefore we are able to think about the one true God and to make accurate statements about him.

Thirdly, and finally, considering who God is can be a dangerous activity if we are merely doing it for academic purposes; to grow in our knowledge of him simply for knowledge’s sake. As our verse concludes, this knowledge of God is revealed ... “*that we may follow all the words of this law*”. God reveals himself to us so that we might respond in repentance and faith, worship and obedience.

J. I. Packer captures these sentiments well in the following quote. “*We should never forget that theology is for doxology: the truest expression of trust in a great God will always be worship, and it will always be proper worship to praise God for being far greater than we can know*”.

Pray

In light of the comments above, spend some time committing each other and this upcoming series of studies to the Lord.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² It would be a good idea to read this section out to the group before commencing the study in prayer.

Discussion Starter³

If you were to ask people the question, ‘Who is God?’, what responses do you think you might receive?

Bible Reading

Read Acts 17:16-34.

Passage Questions

We are told that Paul is “greatly distressed”⁴ by what he sees in Athens (v 16). How does he respond to these feelings of distress?

It is interesting to note that in verse 17 we are told that Paul reasons with people both in the “synagogue” (the Jewish place of meeting for worship) and also in the “marketplace” (the meeting place for Athenians to discuss and debate).

What are some of the different reactions that Paul receives?

“What is this babbler trying to say?” (v 18). “He seems to be advocating foreign gods” (v 18). Paul is brought to the Areopagus (a respected and prestigious institution in Athens that dealt with moral and religious matters). He is brought there in response to the “new teaching” (v 19) and “strange ideas” (v 20) that he is presenting.

Why do you think the people might have reacted in this way? What is Luke’s explanation in verse 18?⁵

Luke points to the fact that Paul is “preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (v 18) as the basis for the various reactions that Paul receives.

Activity

Paul then addresses this meeting of the Areopagus and makes known to them the “unknown God”.

From verses 24-29, and using a whiteboard or butcher’s paper, have the group summarise what Paul says about who God is⁶.

³ This is a good opportunity for a number of the group members to contribute. The question is general and open enough for all to feel sufficiently confident to answer. If people share at this early part of the study they are more likely to share as the study progresses.

⁴ A more literal translation is that “his spirit was provoked within him” (ESV).

⁵ Be sure to allow sufficient time for group members to respond personally to the first question before asking the second, follow-up question.

⁶ This is the heart of the study so be prepared to allow sufficient time here. Also, try and encourage your group members to either paraphrase what Paul says or capture the sense of what he says by using a one or two word descriptor. This will push them to not just regurgitate word-for-word what is said about God here but to also start processing the content and thinking it through for themselves.

God made the world and everything in it (v 24).

God is the Lord of heaven and earth (v 24).

God does not live in temples built by hands (v 24).

God gives life, breath and everything else to people – meaning that he is not served by human hands as if he needs anything (v 25).

God made every nation of people from one man with the intention that they inhabit the whole earth (v 26).

God determined the times set for people (v 26).

God determined the exact places where people would live (v 26).

God's desire is that people would seek him, reach out for him and find him (v 27)

God is not far from each one of us (v 27).

In God we live and move and have our being (v 28).

We are God's offspring (vv 28-29).

God is not like gold or silver or stone – he is not an image made by man's design and skill (v 29).

Passage Questions cont.

How do verses 30-31 help us to understand Paul's distress over idolatry?

The time of God overlooking ignorance in this regard is past. Now all people everywhere need to repent. God has set a day when he will justly judge all people by the man he has appointed (Jesus).

What responses does Paul receive after he finishes his speech?

Some sneer (v 32). Others indicate a willingness to continue to hear what Paul has to say (v 32). A few people believe – including Dionysius and Damaris (v 34).

Application Questions

Think back to the responses we shared at the beginning of the study and also look at the responses on the whiteboard/butcher's paper. What are some of the differences between how people often think of God and who God actually is?

In what ways is Paul a good model for us as we seek to respond to people with different views?

Look at the whiteboard/butcher's paper again. What corrections do you personally need to make in terms of your own view of God?

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology⁷

Each week, as a lead-in to finishing the study with a time of prayer, a suggested song has been included. You can either sing it together as a group, listen to a version online, or simply read out the lyrics. The suggested song is intended to be a creative way of informing our prayers as your group reflects on what they have seen in God's Word.

Given that this week's study introduces our series entitled 'Behold our God', the suggested song is 'Behold our God' by Sovereign Grace.

If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqrli3Lkf58>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Who has held the oceans in His hands
Who has numbered every grain of sand
Kings and nations tremble at His voice
All creation rises to rejoice

Chorus

Behold our God seated on His throne
Come let us adore Him
Behold our King nothing can compare
Come let us adore Him

Verse 2

Who has given counsel to the Lord
Who can question any of His words
Who can teach the One who knows all things
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds

Chorus

Verse 3

Who has felt the nails upon His hand
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal humbled to the grave
Jesus Savior risen now to reign

Chorus

Bridge

You will reign forever (Let Your glory fill the earth) (REPEAT 4X)

Chorus

CCLI Song # 5937510

Jonathan Baird | Meghan Baird | Ryan Baird | Stephen Altrogge

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Sovereign Grace Worship (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)

⁷ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 2: God is Three, God is One (John 13-16)¹

Big Idea: There is a complex unity to God – he is one God and yet three persons. Far from being an unnecessary or irrelevant truth, God as Trinity is at the very heart of how God has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) grasp more deeply the truth that God is three and God is one; (ii) become less embarrassed and less fearful of this truth; and (iii) grow in their understanding of the implications of this truth for their lives.

Discussion Starter²

When you hear the phrase, ‘God is three and God is one’, or the word ‘Trinity’, what thoughts and feelings do you experience?

Prayer

Last week we commenced our series of studies by reading Deuteronomy 29:29 ...

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law”.

As we come to this study, it is especially important that we remind ourselves of the truths that we drew out from this verse³. In line with this, Jensen and Payne make the following helpful comments about the Trinity:

“Christians have too often been defensive and negative about the doctrine of the Trinity. We feel the need to apologise for believing something for which we can find no parallels or analogies in life ... We should not be embarrassed. It shouldn’t surprise me that God turns out to be greater and more complex than anything I know of in this world. There are many things in this world that I find difficult to comprehend, so I should not be surprised that I cannot completely fathom the Creator of the universe. This is not to say that the Trinity is an impenetrable mystery that I cannot understand in any fashion at all. We must not confuse knowing everything with knowing something. I can know that God is three persons and one God”⁴.

In light of the above, as well as your interactions during the ‘Discussion Starter’, spend some time praying for each other as you look at God’s Word together.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² Remember from the first study in this series that the ‘Discussion Starter’ plays an important role in the overall study. Therefore, resist the temptation to view it merely as an entrée/introduction that just needs to be fulfilled before the main course/main section. It represents an important opportunity for a number of the group members to contribute. The question used for a ‘Discussion Starter’ should therefore be general and open enough for all to feel sufficiently confident to answer. If people share at this early stage in the study they are more likely to share further as the study progresses.

³ See Study 1 – ‘Series introduction’ – if you or your group need reminding of this.

⁴ The Blueprint, Jensen and Payne, p 28.

Bible Reading

The truth that God is one God and yet three persons can be seen throughout the Scriptures. However, it is in Jesus – God with us – that this truth is made known to us most clearly. Therefore, we will restrict ourselves in this study to some of the richest teaching that Jesus himself provides – his words of farewell to his disciples in the upper room on the night before his death.

Read John 13:31-14:11.

Activity

Split your group into pairs/triplets and hand out a print-out of Appendix 1 to each small group. Instruct each pair/triplet to work together and fill out on the first table what we discover in this passage regarding the relationship between God the Son (Jesus) and God the Father⁵.

God the Son (Jesus)	↔	God the Father
13:31-32 <i>In the Son of Man (Jesus) being glorified, God is also glorified in him. God will glorify the Son in himself.</i>		
14:1-4 <i>Jesus says, “Trust in God; trust also in me” (!). Jesus is going to his Father’s house to prepare a place for the disciples. His going is his assurance that he will return and take them to his Father’s house.</i>		
14:7-9 <i>Knowing Jesus = Knowing the Father. Anyone who sees Jesus has seen the Father.</i>		
14:10-11 <i>The Son (Jesus) is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. Jesus’ words are not his own – they are his Father, living in him, doing his work.</i>		

Bring the pairs/triplets back together again to share with each other what they have discovered.

What do we find out from those verses in terms of the relationship between God the Son and God the Father?

Was there anything that you found new, interesting or thought-provoking?⁶

⁵ In the interests of time, you may like to allocate certain verses to particular groups rather than all of the groups looking at all of the verses.

⁶ Framing the question in terms of what people find surprising (i.e. note the use of the words “new”, “interesting” and “thought-provoking”) can be a helpful way to get people to think through the meaning/interpretation of a passage, without actually realising that that is what they are doing. This can be good for group members who are not as skilled at, or who are not particularly confident in, moving from what the text says to what the text means (from comprehension to interpretation). It is a good kind of question to have up your sleeve whenever you are leading a small group Bible discussion.

Jesus' words in John 14:6 (*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"*) have rightly become well-known. Spend some time together unpacking each aspect of Jesus' claim⁷.

Bible Reading

Read John 15:26-16:15.

Activity

Once again, split your group into pairs/triplets⁸. Using the second table on the same handout as before (Appendix 1), instruct each pair/triplet to work together and fill out what we discover in this passage regarding the relationships between God the Son (Jesus), God the Holy Spirit (the Counsellor) and God the Father⁹.

God the Son (Jesus) → ← God the Holy Spirit (the Counsellor) → ← God the Father
15:26 <i>Jesus will send the Holy Spirit from the Father. The Holy Spirit is described as the "Spirit of truth" (cf Jesus in 14:6). The Holy Spirit "goes out" from the Father. The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus.</i>
16:7 <i>Unless Jesus goes away, the Holy Spirit will not come to the disciples. If Jesus goes, he will send the Holy Spirit to the disciples.</i>
16:12-13 <i>The Holy Spirit (the "Spirit of truth") will guide the disciples into all truth. The Spirit does not speak on his own – he speaks only what he hears. The Holy Spirit will tell the disciples what is to come.</i>
16:14-15 <i>The Holy Spirit will bring glory to Jesus. The Holy Spirit will do this by taking from what is Jesus' and making that known to the disciples. All that belongs to the Father is Jesus'.</i>

Bring the pairs/triplets back together again to share with each other what they have discovered.

What do we find out from those verses in terms of the relationships between God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and God the Father?

Was there anything that you found new, interesting or thought-provoking?

⁷ That is, spend some time firstly discussing what it means for him to be *"the way"*, then secondly some time discussing what it means for him to be *"the truth"*, and finally some time discussing what it means for him to be *"the life"*. Often people become overly familiar with well-known verses to the extent that they actually haven't spent much time thinking them through in detail.

⁸ You can either retain the same pairs/triplets from the first activity or split the group into different ones. Both methods have their benefits.

⁹ Again, in the interests of time, you may like to allocate certain verses to particular groups rather than all of the groups looking at all of the verses.

In John 16:8, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgement. How would you explain how he does this, in your own words?¹⁰

Application Questions

Imagine if Jesus was not God. How would that change your day-to-day life?

Imagine if the Holy Spirit was not God. How would that change your day-to-day life?

Gregory of Nazianzus – a famous Christian from the 4th century AD – stated, “*When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit*”. Why is it that we rarely think this way? What are some of the problems that result from our wrong thinking in this regard?

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 2 – ‘Theology to Doxology’ and then close the study with a time of prayer.

¹⁰ Sometimes people can become a bit anxious when they are asked to respond in their own words. Perhaps they are afraid that they will not ‘get it right’. One of the many strengths of small group Bible studies is the fact that members can help each other grow in their understanding and ability to explain God’s word. This means that there will be times when we do not ‘get it right’. These should be seen as opportunities rather than threats. Stretching people by insisting that they explain in their own words helps them to not simply regurgitate what the Bible says word-for-word but to express God’s truth in a way that is a more natural expression of how they would speak to others on any given topic.

Appendix 1 – God is Three, God is One

Table 1

God the Son (Jesus)	↔	God the Father
	13:31-32	
	14:1-4	
	14:7-9	
	14:10-11	

Table 2

God the Son (Jesus) ↔	God the Holy Spirit (the Counsellor) ↔	God the Father
	15:26	
	16:7	
	16:12-13	
	16:14-15	

Appendix 2 – Theology to Doxology¹¹

For this study, there are two options for our ‘Theology to Doxology’ section. You could use either song, or even both of them, for your group.

Firstly, if you would like to listen to a highly-recommended and fun song that does an excellent job at capturing the truths of this study, try:

Colin Buchanan, *Rev Master-T’s Trinity Mashmix* (‘God Rock’ album).

The lyrics are printed below:

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Three names
The Trinity

Every time I think of the Three
My mind is drawn to
Drawn to the One

And every time I think of the One
My mind is drawn to
Drawn to the Three

And I think Gregory expresses that brilliantly
Gregory Nazianzus
Gregory expresses that brilliantly

In terms of the Trinity
There is a point at which one
Has to stop speculation

And simply
Bow down and worship
Bow down and
Bow down and
Bow down and worship

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
God is Three and God is One
The Trinity

CCLI Song # 5977855
Colin Buchanan
© 2011 Wanaaring Road Music

¹¹ Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

Instead, or as well as, Colin Buchanan's song you could use *'Praise the Father, Praise the Son'* by Chris Tomlin to sing together or listen to.

If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpyIc7aR8BQ>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

O sov'reign God O matchless King
The saints adore the angels sing
And fall before the throne of grace
To You belongs the highest praise

Verse 2

These sufferings this passing tide
Under Your wings I will abide
And ev'ry enemy shall flee
You are my hope and victory

Chorus

(Oh) praise the Father praise the Son
(And) praise the Spirit Three in One
Clothed in power and in grace
The name above all other names

Verse 3

To the valley for my soul
Thy great descent has made me whole
Your word my heart has welcomed home
Now peace like water ever flows

Chorus (x 2)

Bridge

Yours is the kingdom Yours is the power
Yours is the glory forever
Yours is the kingdom Yours is the power
Yours is the glory forever

Final Chorus

Praise the Father praise the Son
And praise the Spirit Three in One
Clothed in power and in grace
The name above all other names
The name above all other names

CCLI Song # 5203251

Chris Tomlin | Ed Cash

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ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 3: God is Glorious (Exodus 33-34)¹

Big Idea: God’s glory can be seen in his revelation of himself to Moses and ultimately in his revelation to us through his Son, Jesus.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) grasp the magnitude of what it means for God to be glorious; (ii) recognise the great privilege that comes with being part of the new covenant in Christ; and (iii) respond in appropriate worship of this God.

Discussion Starter:

Option 1

What are some things that we might describe as being “glorious”?

Option 2

Split your group into pairs/triplets. Provide each sub-group with a sheet of paper and some coloured pencils/crayons/textas. Instruct each group to draw things that come to mind when they hear the word “glorious”.

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading²

Our main Bible passages for this study come from towards the end of the Old Testament book of Exodus. To set the scene, God has rescued his people from slavery in Egypt through the event of the exodus (Chapter 12). He is in the process of leading and guiding his rescued people to the Promised Land. Along the way he has brought them to Mt Sinai to instruct them in how they are to live as his rescued people (Chapter 19). Despite God’s constant and gracious provision, the Israelites have shown themselves to be a discontent and rebellious people, culminating in the incident of the Golden Calf (Chapter 32).

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² In a topical/doctrinal series of studies such as this, where we are regularly moving from one part of the Bible to another, it is imperative that we provide people with the biblical-theological framework of the Bible. Omitting the context in which particular biblical texts are located can easily lead to erroneous interpretation and application. Setting the context can be done by way of question and answer. Another way, such as has been adopted here, is simply for the leader to briefly provide an outline of the context. If you would like to do further reading in biblical theology, Graeme Goldsworthy’s *Gospel and Kingdom* and Vaughn Roberts’ *God’s Big Picture* are both very helpful.

Read Exodus 33:12-23.

Passage Questions

What is Moses' request in verse 18?

Moses asks for God to show him his glory.

What are some of the different ways in which God *could* have shown Moses his glory?

In the biblical account thus far, there has been the creation itself, the flood, the exodus, a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, the provision of manna and quail and water from a rock, Mt Sinai etc. Given God's wisdom, greatness and power there are any number of possible suggestions that could be made here³.

What is interesting about God's response in verse 19?

Not many of us would have expected God to respond in the way he does. God shows his glory verbally – he speaks. More specifically: (i) He directly links his “glory” with his “goodness”. (ii) He promises to proclaim his name, the LORD (Yahweh) – the promise making, promise keeping God. (iii) In terms of his character, he promises to act in sovereign mercy and compassion. Even the very fact that God is prepared to assent to Moses' request in any way, especially given the recent incident with the Golden Calf, could be seen as a surprising expression of his goodness and grace.

Why do you think God places a restriction on his display of glory?

If Moses were to see God's face, God indicates that he would die – hence the necessity for him to hide Moses in the rock.

Bible Reading

Read Exodus 34:1-8 and 34:29-35.

Passage Questions

In verses 5-7 God makes good on his earlier promise to show Moses his glory. How does he do that?

God comes down in the cloud, stands with Moses and proclaims his name – the LORD. He passes in front of Moses (cf 33:22) and makes various statements and assertions about his character. That is, his glory is seen in the fact that he is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness and rebellion and sin, and punishing those who are guilty.

³ The aim of the question is not for people to provide the 'correct' answer as such but rather to simply get them to think through the hypothetical possibilities of how God *could* have responded to Moses' request.

What effect does this display of glory have on Moses?

Moses bows down to the ground and worships God (v 8).

What other effect is emphasised at the end of the chapter?

Moses' face is so radiant from his contact with God that he needs to veil his face in the presence of others (v 29, 30, 35).

How have these passages challenged you to think differently about God's glory?⁴

Activity

Split your group into three smaller groups. Have them reflect on one of the following three passages and the related questions⁵.

Group 1 – John 1:14, 18

Read John 1:14 and John 1:18. What is John's claim concerning Jesus? Why is this so significant, given what we have seen from Exodus?

In the Word become flesh (Jesus) John claims that he, and the other disciples, have seen the glory of the One and Only (v 14). Jesus has made the unseen God known (v 18).

Jesus' coming is explicitly linked with glory. Moses was only permitted to see 'the back' of God because of the warning that no one could see God and live. In Jesus he is seen face to face.

Group 2 – John 14:8-9

Last week in Study 2 we read some of Jesus' words in John 14. Have a look again at John 14:8-9. Given what we have seen from Exodus, what is so significant about what Jesus says here?

Note that there are some similarities between Philip's request of Jesus and Moses' request of God. Stunningly Jesus says that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father!

⁴ This summary question serves an important purpose. It could be possible for group members to have got to this point in the study (the end of the readings and questions related to the Old Testament passages) and still not have a very clear picture of what God's glory actually is. The question causes all group members to pause and process what they have seen so far in a way that will hopefully consolidate the information that they have been receiving, before moving into the New Testament passages that point us to Christ, and the final section which seeks to make some application to our lives. If, on occasion, you get the feeling that some group members might be getting 'left behind' or that the group seems to be struggling to grasp a particular concept, summary questions such as this one can be useful.

⁵ If you would like to provide handouts for these smaller groups, please see Appendix 1.

Group 3 – Hebrews 1:1-4

Read Hebrews 1:1-4. How is the Son, Jesus, spoken of in these verses? What is the significance of what is said here, given what we have seen in Exodus?

God has spoken to us in these last days through his Son. The Son is the heir of all things. God made the universe through him. The Son is the radiance of God's glory. The Son is the exact representation of God's being. The Son sustains all things by his powerful word. The Son provided purification for sins. The Son has sat down at the right hand of God.

The particular significance of this passage in relation to Exodus is that in the Son we have "the radiance of God's glory".

Bring the groups back together to briefly share with each other what they discovered.

Application Question

Sometimes as Christians we can look at spectacular passages like Exodus 33-34 and feel like we have missed out. Together, read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. How does this passage speak into those feelings?⁶

This passage outlines a series of contrasts between the old and new covenants. Moses – and the Israelites – were part of the old covenant. Through Jesus, Christians are part of the new covenant.

The ministry of the Spirit is more glorious than the ministry of death (v 8). The ministry that brings righteousness is more glorious than the ministry that condemns (v 9). The glory of that which lasts is much greater than the glory of that which was fading away (v 11). By comparison to the surpassing glory of the new covenant, the old can even be spoken of as having no glory (v 10)! Unlike Moses we are able to be very bold because in Christ the veil has been taken away (vv 12-14). We now, having unveiled faces, reflect/contemplate the Lord's glory (v 18). We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord (v 18).

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 2 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

⁶ Given that there is only one application question in this study, and given that this passage from 2 Corinthians 3 is so rich, make sure that you allocate enough time in your study for your group to really engage with what is being said here.

Appendix 1*Group 1 – John 1:14, 18*

Read John 1:14 and John 1:18.

What is John's claim concerning Jesus?

Why is this so significant, given what we have seen from Exodus?

Group 2 – John 14:8-9

Last week in Study 2 we read some of Jesus' words in John 14. Have a look again at John 14:8-9.

Given what we have seen from Exodus, what is so significant about what Jesus says here?

Group 3 – Hebrews 1:1-4

Read Hebrews 1:1-4.

How is the Son, Jesus, spoken of in these verses?

What is the significance of what is said here, given what we have seen in Exodus?

Appendix 2 – Theology to Doxology⁷

For our *'Theology to Doxology'* in this study, Geoff Bullock's song *'Oh the mercy of God'* has been selected. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZX12Iw502A>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Oh the mercy of God, The glory of grace
That You chose to redeem us, To forgive and restore
And You call us Your children, Chosen in Him
To be holy and blameless, To the glory of God

Chorus

To the praise of His glorious grace
To the praise of His glory and power
To Him be all glory, honour and praise
Forever and ever and ever, Amen

Verse 2

Oh the richness of grace, The depths of His love
In Him is redemption, The forgiveness of sin
You called us as righteous, Predestined in Him
For the praise of His glory, Included in Christ

Chorus

Verse 3

Oh the glory of God, Expressed in His Son
His image and likeness, Revealed to us all
The plan of the ages, Completed in Christ
That we be presented, Perfected in Him

Chorus

CCLI Song # 1930937

Geoff Bullock

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⁷ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 4: God is Holy (Isaiah 6)¹

Big Idea: As pictured in Isaiah’s awesome and terrifying vision in the temple, God is a holy God.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) comprehend God’s holiness for themselves; (ii) acknowledge their own unworthiness before God; and (iii) grow in their thankfulness for Christ’s atoning work at the cross.

Discussion Starter

At different times the Bible speaks of people relating to God as they would relate to a friend. For example, in Exodus 33 (just before the passage we looked at last week) we read, “*The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend*” (Exodus 33:11). The book of James mentions that Abraham was “*called God’s friend*” (James 2:23). Jesus says to his disciples, “*You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you*” (John 15:14-15). We even sing the song, “*What a friend we have in Jesus*”.

This is a precious truth. However, what are some of the dangers if we only think of God in this way?

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading²

The book of Isaiah opens with his nation in serious trouble. Uzziah, Judah’s strong king for half a century, was dying. Assyria, the evil empire to the East, was restless and threatening. In Chapter 6, Isaiah receives a vision of God.

Read Isaiah 6:1-7.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² Please see the comments in Study 3 – Footnote 2 with regards to the importance of placing biblical texts in their context. Hence the brief outline here providing the context of Isaiah.

Activity

Option 1

Split into groups of three or four. Provide blank sheets of paper and coloured pencils/textas/crayons. Have each group draw the scene depicted in verses 1-2 of the passage³.

Have each group share their drawing with the other groups.

What stood out to you as you sought to capture this scene?

Option 2

Have the group list each of the descriptions in verse 1 of the vision. Pause at each point and briefly discuss what that particular aspect communicates about God.

I.e. “seated on a throne”; “high and exalted”; “the train of his robe (i.e. just the bottom part) filled the temple”.

Passage Questions

In verse 3 the seraphs⁴ call out to each other. What might be the significance of their repetition?

The three-fold repetition of “holy” has the effect of communicating that God is particularly holy. Motyer states, “Hebrew uses repetition to express superlatives or to indicate totality ... Holiness is supremely the truth about God, and his holiness is in itself so far beyond human thought that a ‘super-superlative’ has to be invented to express it”⁵.

What effect do their voices have?

The doorposts and thresholds shake, and the temple is filled with smoke (v 4).

If this is the effect that *their* voices have, what does that say about the One that they worship?

The implication is surely that the One they worship must be an incredibly awesome and powerful figure.

Is this the way you often view God? Why/why not?

³ If you are feeling extra adventurous you could even provide various craft supplies and have the groups create a collage of the scene.

⁴ The seraphim were heavenly beings associated with the task of guarding the divine throne (‘Seraphim’, *New Bible Dictionary*, p 1077).

⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah – An Introduction and Commentary*, p 77

Why does Isaiah respond in the way he does?

The holiness of God has been impressed upon him and he realises that both he, and those he lives amongst, are unholy. Hence his outbursts of “Woe to me!” and “I am ruined!” (v 5). Additionally, and connected with themes that we saw in Study 3 from Exodus 33-34, seeing the King, the LORD Almighty, is cause for great fear. One’s very life is at risk (cf Exodus 33:20).

Do you often feel like Isaiah does here? Why/why not?

Clearly there are significant problems created when a holy God comes into contact with people or things that are unholy. What is the way ahead suggested by the seraph’s actions in verses 6 and 7?

The seraph takes a live coal from the altar (connected with the temple – the place of sacrifice) and touches Isaiah’s mouth with it (cf “I am a man of unclean lips” – v 5). The seraph promises that Isaiah’s guilt is taken away and his sin atoned for.

Application Questions

This passage from Isaiah is just one of many in the Bible that reveal to us that God is a holy God. In fact, in the Old Testament the adjective “holy” is attached to God’s name more often than any of the other adjectives put together⁶. Although this is the case, what causes us to forget or minimise this aspect of God’s character?

A French critic of Christianity once said, “The good God will forgive me; that’s his job (or his speciality)”⁷. Why can’t God just forgive our sin?

Read Romans 3:21-26.

How is it possible for us as unholy people to relate to this holy God?

How can we remain filled with awe at God’s holiness and yet also filled with thankfulness for what he has done for us at the cross?

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 1 – ‘Theology to Doxology’ and then close the study with a time of prayer.

⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p 77.

⁷ Quoted in John Stott’s, *The Cross of Christ*, p 87.

Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology⁸

For our *'Theology to Doxology'* in this study it is appropriate that we use the classic hymn, *'Holy, holy, holy'*. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCnRYj3lMIQ>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Holy holy holy
 Lord God Almighty
 Early in the morning
 Our song shall rise to Thee
 Holy holy holy
 Merciful and mighty
 God in three persons
 Blessed Trinity

Verse 2

Holy holy holy
 All the saints adore Thee
 Casting down their golden crowns
 Around the glassy sea
 Cherubim and seraphim
 Falling down before Thee
 Who was, and is,
 And evermore shall be

CCLI Song # 1156
 John Bacchus Dykes | Reginald Heber
 © Words: Public Domain
 Music: Public Domain

Verse 3

Holy holy holy
 Though the darkness hide Thee
 Though the eye of sinful man
 Thy glory may not see
 Only Thou art holy
 There is none beside Thee
 Perfect in power
 In love and purity

Verse 4

Holy holy holy
 Lord God Almighty
 All Thy works shall praise Thy name
 In earth and sky and sea
 Holy holy holy
 Merciful and mighty
 God in three persons
 Blessed Trinity

⁸ Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 5: God is Love (1 John 4)¹

Big Idea: God is love and shows what love is by sending his Son as a sacrifice for those who are unlovable.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) think critically about their own understanding of what love is; (ii) deepen their understanding of God’s love for them in Christ; and (iii) be challenged and inspired to reflect God’s love in their love for others.

Discussion Starter²

Split your group into pairs/triplets. Give each pair/triplet one or two of the following descriptions of love and get them to think through what is being communicated in terms of what love is.

“A single text from you can change my mood at any moment”

“Meeting you was fate, becoming your friend was a choice, but falling in love with you was beyond my control”

“You see me at my absolute worst, and you love me anyway”

“To love is nothing ... To be loved is something ... To love and be loved in return is everything”

“They say that love is the key to happiness. You must have unlocked my heart because I am so happy with you”

“Never love anybody who treats you like you’re ordinary”

“Love is easy and natural when you do it with all your heart”

“Love the person who deserves it, not the one who requires it”

“Love is the only thing that everybody needs”

“When love is not madness it’s never love”

“Love is the absence of judgement”

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² This Discussion Starter requires some forethought on the part of the leader in terms of ensuring that each pair/triplet has a balance of different kinds of descriptions. Some are more intellectual and thought provoking, whereas others are more light-hearted. It would be good if each pair/triplet has a mix of these rather than just one particular kind. A copy of the quotes has been included in Appendix 1 with larger print and spacing for you to make use of.

“Love is like a magic key that opens the door to happiness”

Bring the groups back together and get them to briefly report back to each other from their discussions.

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading

Read 1 John 4:7-21.

Passage Questions

Twice in this passage John makes his famous statement, *“God is love”* (verse 8 and verse 16). But as we saw at the beginning of our study, there are many different definitions of love. How has God shown his love?³

God sent his one and only Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice in order that we might avert wrath and experience life (v 9-10).

The quality and quantity of love can be seen both in terms of the one giving the love and also in terms of the one receiving the love. Verses 9 and 10 tell us a lot about God’s love and it is worthwhile considering the various parts in detail.

John says that God *“sent his one and only Son”* (v 9). What does this tell us about God’s love?

We may judge someone’s love by what they are prepared to give – the nature of their gift(s). God gives the greatest gift possible in his Son. Paul uses this line of reasoning in Romans 8:32 – “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

From verse 10, what did Jesus do when he was sent into the world?

God sent his Son “as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (v 10)⁴.

³ Be careful not to go into too much detail in this discussion given that the following questions seek to draw out the various aspects contained in verses 9 and 10.

⁴ You may need to take a little while unpacking this reference. If you have a group that is more spiritually immature you may like to provide a brief explanation yourself, such as the following: “An atoning sacrifice, or propitiation, is something or someone that turns away anger or wrath” (the NIV footnote is helpful here). If you have a more mature group you could ask the follow up question, “What does that mean?”

What does this tell us about God's love?

In John's mind it is the atonement (Jesus' death on the cross) even more than his incarnation (Jesus' birth) that demonstrates God's love. He says something similar in 1 John 3:16 – "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us". The extent of God's love is seen not just in the fact that he sent his Son but that he sent his Son to die as a wrath-averting sacrifice.

How are those who receive God's love described?

"... not that we loved God" ... "for our sins" (v 10).

What does this tell us about God's love?

In the ancient world (perhaps as it still is today) it was thought appropriate to love only those who were regarded as worthy of being loved. God loved us and sent his Son to rescue us not because we are loveable (clearly we are not) but rather because he is love.

From the rest of the passage, what should our response be to God's love?

On numerous occasions throughout the passage John calls on his readers (and us) to love one another in response to, and informed by, God's love for us in Christ.

Activity

Give people five or ten minutes to spend on their own in personal reflection. They may use the following questions to guide them in this⁵.

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I feel discontent in my circumstances or resentful of others?

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I am feeling distrustful or fearful?

If God is love, why do I become half-hearted or cold in living for him?

If God is love, can people see this truth in the way that I love those around me?

Application

As group members feel comfortable, have them share some of their thoughts from the time of personal reflection.

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 3 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

⁵ A print out of these reflection questions can be found in Appendix 2. It would be helpful to print off a copy of these for each group member to use during this time.

Appendix 1 – Discussion Starter

“A single text from you can change my mood at any moment”

“Meeting you was fate, becoming your friend was a choice, but falling in love with you was beyond my control”

“You see me at my absolute worst, and you love me anyway”

“To love is nothing ... To be loved is something ... To love and be loved in return is everything”

“They say that love is the key to happiness. You must have unlocked my heart because I am so happy with you”

“Never love anybody who treats you like you’re ordinary”

“Love is easy and natural when you do it with all your heart”

“Love the person who deserves it, not the one who requires it”

“Love is the only thing that everybody needs”

“When love is not madness it’s never love”

“Love is the absence of judgement”

“Love is like a magic key that opens the door to happiness”

Appendix 2 – Activity: Personal Reflection

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I feel discontent in my circumstances or resentful of others?

If God is love, how does this truth help me when I am feeling distrustful or fearful?

If God is love, why do I become half-hearted or cold in living for him?

If God is love, can people see this truth in the way that I love those around me?

Appendix 3 – Theology to Doxology⁶

For our 'Theology to Doxology' in this study the song, 'Here is love', has been selected. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTOP304FOG0>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Here is love vast as the ocean
Loving-kindness as the flood
When the Prince of Life our Ransom
Shed for us His precious blood
(REPEAT)

Chorus 1

Who His love will not remember
Who can cease to sing His praise
He can never be forgotten
Throughout Heav'n's eternal days

Verse 2

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide

Chorus 2

Grace and love like mighty rivers
Poured incessant from above
Heav'n's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love

CCLI Song # 3287884

Matt Redman | Robert Lowry | William Rees

© 2004 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)

Misc 1

(Bridge)

No love is higher no love is wider
No love is deeper no love is truer
No love is higher no love is wider
No love is like Your love O Lord
(REPEAT 4X)

Misc 2

(Ending)

Yes here is love
Vast as the ocean
Yes here is love
Vast as the ocean
(REPEAT)

⁶ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God
Study 6: God is Merciful in Discipline (Hebrews 12)¹

Big Idea: God demonstrates his Fatherly mercy and love through the discipline of his children

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) consider their natural response to hardships and difficulties in life; and (ii) be challenged and encouraged by the truth that, during those times of discipline, God is acting mercifully towards them.

Discussion Starter

Think about a time in your life when something didn't go according to plan, or when you experienced some kind of difficulty. What can God seem to be like during those times?²

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God's Word.

Bible Reading

Read Hebrews 12:1-13.

Passage Questions

In verses 5 and 6 the author quotes from Proverbs 3. What are two possible responses to discipline that we are to avoid?

We are to avoid making light of God's discipline of us and we are to avoid losing heart (v 5).

How might the truths in verse 6 help us to respond rightly?

Acknowledging that God's discipline of us is an expression of his love and an affirmation of our status as sons will help us to not make light of his discipline nor lose heart during those times.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet 'Meeting God' by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² If you look at the Application questions at the end of the study you will note that this Discussion Starter and the closing applicatory section are intended to work closely together. It is hoped that this question will lay some thought foundations that will be built upon at the end.

Why do we find it difficult to have this perspective?

The events of life can be confusing and distressing for us. Our sinful nature, the world and the devil will all tempt us to dismiss what God might be up to or tempt us to give up on our relationship with him. Discipline will probably not seem loving at the time and may cause us to feel more like God's enemies than his children.

Activity³

Split your group into a few smaller groups consisting of between two and four members in each. Read out the following instructions and provide time for each group to complete the Activity.

In verses 7-10 the author picks up on the family image from Proverbs 3 and provides more detail. Compare and contrast what is said in these verses by filling out the table below.

Verse(s)	Human fathers	God as Father
7-8	<i>Every human father disciplines his sons. Non-discipline is indication that a child is illegitimate and not a true son</i>	<i>God's treatment of us in this way – i.e. discipline – should be taken as affirmation that we are his children</i>
9	<i>The discipline of human fathers produces respect</i>	<i>How much more should we submit to our heavenly Father's discipline</i>
10	<i>Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best</i>	<i>God disciplines us for our good – that we might share in his holiness</i>

Bring the groups back together.

³ A larger blank copy of the table has been provided in Appendix 1 for you to print off and use for each group.

Passage Questions

From these verses (vv 7-10), how would you summarise what God is like?⁴

He is our Father, who through discipline is treating us as sons (v 7). He is the Father of our spirits (v 9). God is working for our good (v 10). God desires for us to share in his holiness (v 10).

From these verses (vv 7-10), how would you summarise how we are to respond to God?

Respect/submission (v 9). Humbly resting in the assurance that we are his children.

In what ways is verse 11 both realistic and hopeful?

The verse doesn't hide the fact that discipline is painful rather than pleasant. But there is also the promise that for those who are trained by the discipline in the end it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

In our last two studies we have concentrated on the truths that 'God is holy' and 'God is love'. How do these two truths come together in what we have been considering in this study?

If God merely loved in the way that we often think of love (of course, as we saw in the previous study, he doesn't), he would treat us sentimentally and be unlikely to exercise any discipline at all. If God were merely holy we would undoubtedly experience his discipline (and more, given what we saw in that study) yet this would be without the assurance of him being our loving heavenly Father.

Interestingly, both concepts ("love" and "holy") are explicitly included in this passage. Verse 6 states that God disciplines those he "loves" and verse 10 speaks of sharing in God's "holiness" through discipline.

⁴ Including these kinds of questions after an activity in which the larger group has been split up can be very useful. It brings the groups back to the same common understanding and awareness (which is particularly important for groups that may have struggled with the activity) and by asking the groups to summarise as opposed to merely reporting back it helps them to reflect and process what they have observed.

Application Questions⁵

Share of an occasion in life where you feel that you experienced the Lord's discipline.

How were you tempted to either treat it lightly or to lose heart?

As you look back, in what ways did you experience some of the truths that we've seen in this study?

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 2 – 'Theology to Doxology' and then close the study with a time of prayer.

⁵ It is worth noting that these application questions, and quite possibly the whole study, will be sensitive for some group members. This is where it becomes apparent that a Bible study leader is much more than merely a Bible teacher. There is a pastoral element to this ministry that we cannot, and must not, lose sight of. You may, or may not, be aware of significant struggles in the lives of those in your care. The truth of God's discipline is one that we need to be taught as Christians but the manner in which you go about this study will be just as important, if not more so, than its content.

Appendix 1 – Activity

Verse(s)	Human fathers	God as Father

Verse	Human fathers	God as Father

Appendix 2 – Theology to Doxology⁶

For our ‘*Theology to Doxology*’ in this study the song, ‘*God moves in a mysterious way*’, has been selected. If you would like to listen to a more traditional version online, you can use the URL below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z0e_xSC8to

For a more modern version, you can use this URL:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtnapVDuPfg>

Please note that if you use this more modern version, verse 2 is omitted and between verses 4 and 5 some Scriptures (from Genesis 50 and Romans 8) are briefly shown. Interestingly, the clip finishes with a reference to Hebrews 12:10.

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm

Verse 2

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will

Verse 3

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head

Verse 4

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust Him for His grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face

Verse 5

His purposes will ripen fast
Unfolding every hour
The bud may have a bitter taste
But sweet will be the flower

Verse 6

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain
God is His own interpreter
And He will make it plain

CCLI Song # 155909
Thomas Tallis | William Cowper
© Words: Public Domain
Music: Public Domain

⁶ Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 7: God is Triumphant (Romans 8)¹

Big Idea: God is good and in control and is triumphantly always able to bring about his good purposes in the lives of his people.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) understand and acknowledge God’s goodness and control in all things; and (ii) be reassured in this triumphant knowledge as it relates to their particular life circumstances.

Discussion Starter

1. What makes us doubt God’s goodness to us or his control over our lives?

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading

Read Romans 8:28-39.

Passage Questions

2. Romans 8:28 has rightly become a well-known and well-loved verse for many Christians. It speaks of God’s purpose and assures us that he is working for our good in all things. How does verse 29 help us to understand what God’s good purpose is for our lives?

This question is not intended to ‘steal’ someone’s favourite verse away from them. In fact, hopefully it does the exact opposite! However, quite often this verse can be ‘lifted’ from its context in a way that is unhelpful and results in several forms of misunderstanding and misapplication.

The word “for” at the beginning of verse 29 serves to link verse 28 and verse 29 closely together. The “good” that God is at work for in all things is not a ‘good’ of our own defining or making but rather the ultimate ‘good’ of us being “conformed to the likeness of his Son”.

3. Some people describe verse 30 as an “unbroken golden chain”. Why might they describe it in this way?

There are no breaks in the links, all the way from predestination to glorification. Those God predestines, he calls. Those he calls, he justifies. Those he justifies, he glorifies. Note also that each ‘activity’ of God in this verse is in the past tense – surprisingly and stunningly even our glorification!

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

4. Have a look back over verses 28-30. How do these verses help us to see that God is triumphant?²

He is able to be at work in all things. He is able to work all things for our good – our being conformed to Christ's likeness (his good purpose for our lives). He is able to inexorably bring people all the way from being predestined through to being glorified.

Activity

In the rest of the passage (vv 31-39) Paul launches into a series of questions and answers. Split your group into smaller groups of between two and four people (depending on the size of your group) and get them to fill in the table below³.

Verse	Question	What might cause us to ask this question?	Answer (Implied or provided in the surrounding verses)
31b	<i>If God is for us, who can be against us?</i>	<i>Given how triumphant God is (vv 28-30) it is the natural question to ask. In a sense, if vv 28-30 are true, it doesn't matter who is against us – hence Paul's question.</i>	<i>Paul doesn't say that people/things won't be against us. But it doesn't matter because in the end God is for us and has demonstrated this by giving his Son up for us – a guarantee that he will also give us all things (v 32).</i>
33	<i>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?</i>	<i>Others (e.g. non-Christians, the devil)/ourselves bringing charges against us.</i>	<i>Implied answer – no one. Ultimately it is God himself who justifies us (v 33b) and therefore in the end no charges will stand.</i>
34	<i>Who is he that condemns?</i>	<i>Others (e.g. non-Christians, the devil)/ourselves causing us to feel condemned.</i>	<i>Implied answer – no one. Ultimately, Christ – who died and rose again – has ascended to the right hand of God and is interceding for us (v 34b). This means that no condemnation of us will stand.</i>

² In terms of its form, this is a summary question. It serves to capture and summarise what has been discussed so far. In terms of its function, it hopefully serves to crystallise what has been discovered and also bring the group to a similar point of understanding before progressing. This is especially important for those group members who may be learning these truths for the first time or may take longer to process the information. It is also directly in line with the big idea and study aim of the Bible study, which helps the Bible study to stay on target and helps group members to see the point behind the questions being asked and discussed.

³ You may find it helpful to start each group on a different verse. This prevents groups from being distracted by other groups reading the same verse and answering the same question and should ensure that at least between the groups each of the verses are covered. A larger copy of the table has been provided in Appendix 1 for you to hand out to each group member.

35	<i>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?</i>	<i>Various people, events or circumstances may make us feel like we can be, or indeed are, separated from Christ's love.</i>	<i>Paul is explicit here. No one and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ – not trouble, hardship, perseverance, famine, nakedness, danger or sword (v 35b). Paul then further emphasises this point – neither death, life, angels, demons, the present, the future, any powers, height, nor depth. Indeed nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ (vv 38-39).</i>
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Passage Questions cont.

Bring the groups back together.

5. How do these verses help us to see that God is triumphant?

Regardless of who or what may be against us, we are reassured by the event of Christ's death that God is for us and in the end that is all that matters (vv 31-32). Ourselves and/or others may bring charges against us but God is able to justify us (declare us right before him/innocent) because of Christ (v 33), meaning no charges will stand. We may be condemned, or feel condemned, yet Christ himself is interceding for us before God (v 34), meaning that we will receive the verdict "no condemnation". Most triumphantly of all, no one and nothing is able to separate us from God's love for us in Christ (vv 35-39).

Application Questions

6. If you were to put a musical soundtrack to this passage, what would it be?

7. "God is good but he is not in control". "God is in control but he is not good". Discuss these statements in light of what we have seen in this passage.

8. How will this truth – that God is triumphant – help you day-to-day?

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 2 – 'Theology to Doxology' – and then close the study with a time of prayer.

Appendix 1 – Activity

Verse	Question	What might cause us to ask this question?	Answer (Implied or provided in the surrounding verses)
31b			
33			
34			
35			

Appendix 2 – Theology to Doxology⁴

For our ‘*Theology to Doxology*’ in this study the song, ‘*In Christ Alone*’, has been selected. If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below⁵:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8we1VgKX8Qo>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light my strength my song
This Cornerstone this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love what depths of peace
When fears are stilled when strivings cease
My Comforter my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

Verse 2

In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Verse 3

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

Verse 4

No guilt in life no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

CCLI Song # 3350395

Keith Getty | Stuart Townend

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⁴ Theology – literally ‘a word of/about God’ is to lead to Doxology – literally ‘a word of praise/glory’. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

⁵ Please note that this video includes scenes from the movie, ‘The Passion of the Christ’.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 8: God is Beyond Compare (Isaiah 40)¹

Big Idea: God is incomparable and this is particularly seen in terms of creation and his relationship to creation.

Study Aim: That group members will: (i) have their personal understanding of God enlarged to be more in line with how the Scriptures present God; and (ii) be appropriately overwhelmed at who God really is and respond in humble adoration, trust and love.

Discussion Starter

1. In verse 27 of our passage, Isaiah writes, “*Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God?’*” What causes us to have the same kinds of thoughts?
2. How do you usually respond in those times?

Prayer

Spend some time praying together before you look at God’s Word.

Bible Reading²

The book of Isaiah is set in the time after the kingdom of Israel was split into two – the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). Isaiah was one of the prophets to the southern kingdom, Judah. His ministry occurred during the lead-up to the Babylonian invasion and the exile of God’s people. Hence, there is much talk of God’s judgement on his people for the sin that has brought this about – particularly in the first half of the book. We saw some of this when we looked at Isaiah Chapter 6 in Study 4. Chapter 40 represents a significant shift in the flow of the book. From this point on Isaiah moves away from speaking of judgement to emphasising the future hope and comfort that God will eventually bring his people.

Read Isaiah 40:12-31.

¹ This series of studies is loosely based on the booklet ‘Meeting God’ by J. I. Packer in the *Lifeguide Bible Study* series (1986, IVP).

² As mentioned in Study 3, in a topical/doctrinal series of studies such as this, where we are regularly moving from one part of the Bible to another, it is imperative that we provide people with the biblical-theological framework of the Bible. Omitting the context in which particular biblical texts are located can easily lead to erroneous interpretation and application. Setting the context can be done by way of question and answer. Another way, such as has been adopted here, is simply for the leader to briefly provide an outline of the context. Either way, context is crucial.

Activity 1

3. Using a whiteboard or butcher's paper, have the group identify the various ways in which God is described in these verses³.

He measures the waters in the hollow of his hand (v 12). He marks off the heavens with the breadth of his hand (v 12). He holds the dust of the earth in a basket (v 12). He weighs the mountains on scales and the hills in a balance (v 12). No one has understood the LORD's mind or instructed him as his counselor (v 13). The LORD did not consult anyone to enlighten him or teach him the right way (v 14). No one taught God knowledge or showed him the path of understanding (v 14). The nations are as nothing before him and in comparison to him (vv 15-17). No one and nothing can be compared to God – an idol is a laughable comparison (vv 18-20). God sits enthroned above the earth (v 22). People are like grasshoppers in comparison to him (v 22). God stretches out the heavens like a canopy, like a tent to live in (v 22). He brings princes and rulers to nothing (vv 23-24). No one is the Holy One's equal (v 25). He created the heavens (v 26). God brings out the stars one by one and by name (v 26). By his great power and mighty strength not one is missing (v 26). The LORD is the everlasting God (v 28). He is the Creator of the ends of the earth (v 28). He will not grow tired or weary (v 28). No one can fathom his understanding (v 28). God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak (v 29).

Activity 2

4. Split the group into smaller groups of at least three or four members. Give people a few minutes to spend on their own, reflecting on what was written on the whiteboard/butcher's paper. After this time of reflection, have each member share with their small group what particularly impacted them in terms of who God is⁴.

5. Bring the groups back together and have a few members share their thoughts with the larger group.

Questions

6. What kind of emotional response does this chapter produce in you?

Awe. Wonder. Amazement etc.

³ Don't be afraid to take a significant proportion of time on this part of the study. There is a lot to notice here! It is important that the group be given the space to allow their picture of God to build from the passage. Allowing sufficient time here ought to have the desired effect of members being overwhelmed at who God really is. As you will notice, there are not as many questions in the study to compensate for the time spent on this Activity. Also, try not to get caught up in discussing the various aspects mentioned here in too much detail. This would run counter to the activity's purpose and desired effect mentioned above.

⁴ Of course, this activity could be done by keeping the larger group together. However, breaking into smaller groups does seem to prompt quieter/more reserved members to be more willing to share their thoughts. Providing some space for members to reflect before sharing should also increase the likelihood of everyone having something to say – a key goal for leaders to have in any Bible study discussion.

7. Have a look again at the complaint of God's people in verse 27. How do verses 12-26 answer this charge?

God's 'bigness' (his sovereignty, his rule over creation etc) ensures that nothing in his creation is hidden or disregarded by him, even though that may be how his people feel at times. He does not need informing or teaching as to events and circumstances (vv 13-14). He even knows each of the starry hosts by name (v 26).

8. How do verses 28-31 also answer this complaint from God's people?

God could be all that he is described as being in verses 12-26 and yet not necessarily be personal, relational, gracious etc. The closing verses of the chapter remind us that the God who will never tire or grow weary himself is also able and willing to provide "strength to the weary" and power to the weak (v 29). Our way is not hidden from him nor our cause disregarded by him. In fact he longs that we would only put our hope in him that he might renew our strength (v 31).

Read Colossians 1:15-23.

9. In verses 15-19, Paul focuses on who Jesus is. Given what we read in Isaiah, what stands out to you in what Paul says about Jesus?

All things were created by Jesus and for Jesus (v 16). He holds all things together (v 17). All of God's fullness (all that we saw in Isaiah 40, for example, and more) dwells in Jesus (v 19).

10. In verses 20-23, Paul speaks about what Jesus has done. Why is this so amazing?

That the God we saw in Isaiah 40, Jesus who we see described in Colossians 1:15-19, should reconcile enemies through the shedding of his blood is truly remarkable. Words cannot really express the wonder of this. Verse 3 of 'Behold our God' (see Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology') brings this out well.

Close + Prayer

See Appendix 1 – 'Theology to Doxology' – and then close the study with a time of prayer.

Appendix 1 – Theology to Doxology⁵

Given that (apart from the Review Study) this is the last in our series of studies, it is fitting that our final *'Theology to Doxology'* should be *'Behold our God'*. It is also appropriate given that so many of the thoughts expressed in the song, and even the very way in which the lyrics are formed, matches with what we have seen from Isaiah 40.

If you would like to listen to a version online, you can use the URL below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gqrl3Lkf58>

If you would like to sing together or simply read out the lyrics, they are included below:

Verse 1

Who has held the oceans in His hands
Who has numbered every grain of sand
Kings and nations tremble at His voice
All creation rises to rejoice

Chorus

Behold our God seated on His throne
Come let us adore Him
Behold our King nothing can compare
Come let us adore Him

Verse 2

Who has given counsel to the Lord
Who can question any of His words
Who can teach the One who knows all things
Who can fathom all His wondrous deeds

Chorus

Verse 3

Who has felt the nails upon His hand
Bearing all the guilt of sinful man
God eternal humbled to the grave
Jesus Savior risen now to reign

Chorus

Bridge

You will reign forever (Let Your glory fill the earth) (REPEAT 4X)

Chorus

CCLI Song # 5937510

Jonathan Baird | Meghan Baird | Ryan Baird | Stephen Altrogge

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Sovereign Grace Worship (Admin. by Crossroad Distributors Pty. Ltd.)

⁵ Theology – literally 'a word of/about God' is to lead to Doxology – literally 'a word of praise/glory'. Please see the introductory notes to this section in Study 1 – Appendix 1 if you need to recall the rationale behind its inclusion.

ECC Growth Groups – Term 4, 2014
Behold our God – Study 9: Review

Big Idea: To spend time reviewing the various ways in which God has used this series of studies to grow us in our love and knowledge of him.

Study Aim: That group members will have their knowledge consolidated and faith deepened as they review the ways in which God has grown them through this series.

Introduction

At the very beginning of this topical series of studies on who God is we read the following verse from the book of Deuteronomy:

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

As we saw when we commenced the series, this verse reminds us of three important truths.

Firstly, there are some things about God that we will never fully know – *“the secret things belong to the LORD our God”*. As we acknowledge that God is so much bigger and greater, wiser and more wonderful, than we can ever think or imagine we are to grow in our humility before him. Hopefully this has been the case for each one of us throughout this term.

Secondly, this humility should not lead to despondency. Although we can never know all things about God we are able to know God and be known by him – *“the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever”*. God has graciously made himself known to us through his Word and through his Son and therefore we are able to think about the one true God and to make accurate statements about him.

Thirdly, and finally, considering who God is can be a dangerous activity if we are merely doing it for academic purposes; to grow in our knowledge of him simply for knowledge’s sake. As our verse concludes, this knowledge of God is revealed ... *“that we may follow all the words of this law”*. God reveals himself to us so that we might respond in repentance and faith, worship and obedience.

J. I. Packer captures these sentiments well in the following quote. *“We should never forget that theology is for doxology: the truest expression of trust in a great God will always be worship, and it will always be proper worship to praise God for being far greater than we can know”*. Each week we have sought to be true to this by including a song in our *‘Theology to Doxology’* section to conclude our time together.

Discussion Questions¹

1. In this series of studies, we have looked at the following aspects of God's character:

- God is three, God is one;
- God is glorious;
- God is holy;
- God is love;
- God is merciful in discipline;
- God is triumphant; and
- God is beyond compare.

Which study especially stretched you in your understanding of God?

2. What truths about God did you particularly need to hear at this point in your life?
3. For you personally, which study had the most impact on your faith?
4. What do you think are some of the potential dangers in what we have done in this series?
5. Why do you think doing a series of studies like this is important?
6. We ought to be aware of the dangers of 'studying God' and yet we also know that it is vitally important for us. How can we keep growing in our love and knowledge of God in a healthy way?
7. If you used the suggested songs each week, which ones stood out for you personally?

Pray

You can take suggestions for what song(s) to finish this series with.

Spend some time praying together: praising and thanking God for who he is and for making himself known to us, and asking him to continue to grow us in a knowledge and trust that is marked by humility.

¹ As leader you may like to be selective and pick out a few particular questions from the ones listed. There are similarities between many of them in that they are all seeking to help members to review what has been learnt and to further consolidate that knowledge and understanding.