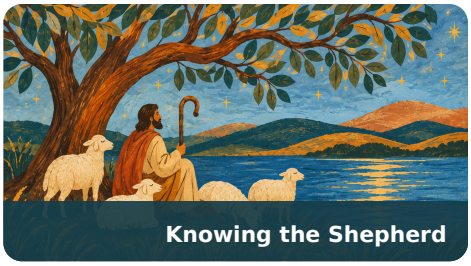
RS JOURNEYS
Go Deeper. Become More.

CHAPTER 3

Holy & Transcendent



CHAPTER OVERVIEW

God is not like us. He is holy, unmatched in glory and purity. Yet the Holy One is the same Shepherd who knows our names and pursues us.

In these encounters, we'll stand before the God of majesty and discover why his holiness is good news. As we come to know him as he truly is, awe and trust grow together.

ENCOUNTER 1

Holy, Holy, Holy

PREPARE

Some passages invite us to stand a little farther back. Isaiah's vision is one of them. Ask God to quiet your heart, and read as someone who has been brought into the throne room.

PONDER

1. Isaiah sees the Lord enthroned, attended by seraphim who cover themselves and cry out to one another. What does this scene communicate about God's holiness? Why might a threefold declaration matter, and what do you notice about the world his glory fills?
2. Isaiah's immediate response is not delight but a confession of uncleanness. What does his reaction reveal about the distance between God's holiness and human sinfulness? How does God answer that confession, and what does his response suggest about his heart?

READ

Isaiah 6:1–8

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice who takes the initiative after Isaiah's confession? Isaiah doesn't cleanse himself. A seraph brings a coal from the altar and touches his lips, declaring that his guilt is taken away.

The very fire that makes Isaiah tremble becomes the means of his cleansing. What might that suggest about the relationship between God's holiness and his mercy?

PRACTICE

Set aside a few quiet minutes today to read Isaiah 6:3 slowly, several times, and let the words become praise. Resist hurrying to application. Simply dwell in the reality that the God who knows you is holy.

PRAYER

Speak to God as the Holy One. Offer him your awe, then tell him honestly where you sense your own need for cleansing. Thank him that he doesn't leave us at a distance.

ENCOUNTER 2

Who Is Like the Lord?

PREPARE

When Israel sang at the edge of the sea, they had just seen the power of God overturn the strongest empire they knew. Their song asks a question no one else could answer. In the reading, listen for how the people describe the God who rescued them.

PONDER

1. What has God done that prompts this song? Notice how the people describe him: his power, his victory, his character. What do these descriptions reveal about who God is?
2. Israel asks, "Who is like you?" What are the "gods" or powers that tend to compete for your trust and awe? How does remembering God's incomparability change the way you see them?

READ

Exodus 15:1–13

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice that the song moves from God's power to his love? In verse 13 (Exodus 15:13)", the God who overwhelmed Pharaoh's army is described as leading the people he has redeemed in steadfast love.

The One who is unmatched in power uses that power on behalf of his people. How might that shape the way you think about God's strength?

PRACTICE

Notice one thing today that tends to feel bigger than God in your thinking, such as a deadline, a fear, a relationship, or a headline. Name it honestly. Then say aloud the question from Exodus 15:11, "Who is like you, O Lord?", and let it put that thing in its place.

PRAYER

Praise God for the ways he has shown himself greater than the things you fear. Ask him to loosen the hold of anything that has taken the place of awe for him.

ENCOUNTER 3

Out of the Whirlwind

PREPARE

Job has suffered terribly and asked hard questions. When God finally speaks, his answer is not what anyone might expect. As you read, pay attention to the kind of questions God asks and what they reveal about the relationship between Creator and creature.

PONDER

1. God answers Job with a series of questions about creation. What do these questions communicate about God's wisdom and power? Why might this be the answer Job needed, even though it doesn't explain his suffering?
2. In Job 42, Job responds with humility and a deeper knowledge of God. How would you describe the change in him? When have your own questions about God run into the limits of your understanding, and how did you respond?

READ

Job 38:1–18 · Job 42:1–6

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice what Job says in Job 42:5? "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."

God never gives Job a reason for his pain. What he gives him is himself. How might that reshape what we hope for when we ask God "why"?

PRACTICE

Take a walk, or simply step outside, and look carefully at something God made. Ask yourself the kinds of questions God asks Job: Who set this in place? Who sustains it? Let wonder lead to humble trust.

PRAYER

Bring God a question you may never see answered. Tell him honestly how it feels, then ask for the grace to trust his wisdom and to know him more than you know the answers.

ENCOUNTER 4

The King of Glory

PREPARE

Psalm 24 was likely sung as worshipers approached the temple in Jerusalem. As you read, imagine a procession drawing near to the place where God dwells. Notice what the psalm declares about the earth, what it asks about the ones who may approach, and the great cry at the gates.

PONDER

1. The psalm opens by declaring who owns the earth and everything in it. How does this opening shape the way we understand the rest of the psalm? What does it mean for your own life that everything belongs to God?
2. The psalmist asks who may ascend God's holy hill and answers with clean hands and a pure heart. What does the question reveal about the seriousness of approaching a holy God? Where do you feel the weight of that question?

READ

Psalm 24

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice that the psalm ends with a question the gates themselves must answer? "Who is this King of glory?"

The answer, the Lord strong and mighty, repeats and deepens. Notice that it isn't just a king who is coming through the gates, but the Lord himself. What do the repeated calls to open the gates suggest about the right response to the arrival of God?

PRACTICE

Return to Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

Consider one area of your life that you ordinarily think of as your own—your time, resources, work, plans, or abilities.

In light of the psalm's declaration that everything belongs to the Lord, choose one concrete way to acknowledge his rightful authority over that part of your life today. Let your response become an act of worship rather than merely a duty.

PRAYER

Worship God as King. Acknowledge that all you have belongs to him, then ask him to purify your heart so that you can draw near with honesty and joy.

ENCOUNTER 5

Holy Ground

PREPARE

Moses is tending sheep in the wilderness when something catches his attention. As you read, notice what draws him closer, what God tells him to do, and how God introduces himself.

PONDER

1. What makes this ordinary place extraordinary? Why might God tell Moses to remove his sandals, and what does Moses' response suggest about how he understands God's presence?
2. God introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before anything else. How does this identification balance the holiness of the moment with the warmth of relationship?

READ

Exodus 3:1–6

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice that the bush burns without being consumed? Before God speaks a single word, the sign itself says something about his presence. Fire is not destroying the bush.

Consider what that image might suggest about the holy God who draws near to those he has made.

PRACTICE

Notice how Moses responds when God calls him by name. Before Moses receives any instructions about what he must do, he is invited to recognize whose presence he has entered.

Consider how you ordinarily approach God in prayer. Instead of rushing to immediately to your concerns and requests, take take time to acknowledge who he is.

Begin your next prayer by deliberately attending to God's holiness and presence before speaking about your needs. Take a posture of reverence, perhaps removing your shoes or bowing your head, and acknowledge that God is present there.

PRAYER

Thank God that he makes himself known in ordinary places. Ask him to give you a deeper awareness of his presence and a reverence that welcomes rather than avoids him.

ENCOUNTER 6

Be Holy

PREPARE

God's holiness isn't only something his people observe from a distance. In Leviticus, God tells Israel that because he is holy, they are to be holy too. As you read, notice how this call connects to ordinary life, not only to worship.

PONDER

1. What does it mean to be holy, based on what these passages describe? Notice how many of the commands concern relationships, honesty, and care for others. What picture of holiness emerges?
2. Peter quotes Leviticus and applies it to Christians. How does the call to holiness change when you recognize that it flows from who God is rather than from a list of rules?

READ

Leviticus 19:1–4; 19:9–18 · 1 Peter 1:13–16

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice how often Leviticus 19 ends commands with "I am the Lord"? That refrain appears again and again, grounding even the smallest instructions in God's own character.

What might this suggest about the relationship between knowing God and living the way he asks?

PRACTICE

Choose one ordinary area of your life, such as how you speak, how you treat a coworker, or how you handle money, and consider how it might reflect the character of the Holy One. Take one small, concrete step in that direction today.

PRAYER

Ask God to shape you into someone whose life reflects his holiness. Speak honestly about areas where you resist, and ask the Holy Spirit to make you willing.

ENCOUNTER 7

Create in Me a Clean Heart

PREPARE

Psalm 51 is the prayer of someone who has sinned seriously and knows it. It is honest, desperate, and hopeful. Read it slowly, as though praying it yourself, and notice where David places his hope.

PONDER

1. David appeals to God's steadfast love and abundant mercy before he mentions anything else. What does this reveal about where he believes his hope lies? How does the order of his prayer shape the way you approach God with your own failures?
2. David asks God to create a clean heart and renew a right spirit, and he insists that God desires a broken and contrite heart. What does it mean that God desires truthfulness rather than polished performance?

READ

Psalm 51:1–17

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice the verbs David uses in verses 1–2 and 7–10 (Psalm 51:1-10)"? Blot out, wash, cleanse, purge, create, renew.

Every one of them asks God to act. David doesn't promise to fix himself. What does that suggest about how the holy God deals with sin?

PRACTICE

Take a few quiet minutes to pray Psalm 51:10–12 as your own prayer. If something comes to mind that you need to confess, name it plainly to God without excuses, and receive his forgiveness as a gift.

PRAYER

Pray honestly about anything that weighs on your conscience. Ask God to cleanse you, renew your heart, and restore the joy of his salvation.

ENCOUNTER 8

The Fire That Purifies

PREPARE

Prophets sometimes use the image of fire to describe the work of God. It can sound alarming. As you read, notice what the fire is meant to accomplish, and what God intends for his people when the refining is complete.

PONDER

1. Malachi describes God as a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap. What is the purpose of each image? What do they suggest about God's intentions toward his people?
2. Hebrews describes God as a “consuming fire” and calls us to worship with reverence and awe. How does this deepen the picture of God's holiness in Malachi? What do these passages reveal about both the seriousness of his judgment and his desire to purify his people?

READ

Malachi 3:1–4 · Hebrews 12:28–29

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice who is being purified in Malachi 3:3? He will purify the sons of Levi, the very people who serve in worship, so that they can bring offerings in righteousness.

The refining isn't an end in itself. It prepares a people to offer true worship. How does that deepen your understanding of what God is doing when he refines us?

PRACTICE

Return to Malachi 3:2–3. Notice that the refiner's purpose is to remove what corrupts the precious metal, not to discard the metal itself.

Reflect on a difficulty or season of correction in your life. Ask God to bring to your attention an attitude, habit, or desire that does not reflect his holy character. Write down one honest observation, and offer it to God.

Rather than trying to excuse it or immediately resolve it through your own effort, bring it honestly before him. Consider how the Shepherd might be purifying and shaping you through it.

PRAYER

Ask God to refine you. Ask for his grace to cleanse and reshape that part of your life. Tell him where you fear the cost, and thank him that his purposes are for your good and for true worship.

ENCOUNTER 9

High and Lifted Up, Yet Near

PREPARE

God can seem too great to approach, or too near to take seriously. Isaiah 57:15 holds both truths together. As you read, notice how God describes himself, and the kind of people he says he dwells with.

PONDER

1. How does God describe himself in Isaiah 57:15? What do you notice about the pairing of "high and lofty" with "dwells with the contrite and lowly"?
2. In Isaiah 66, God asks what kind of house anyone could build for him, then says whom he looks to. What does this reveal about what matters to the Holy One? How does it shape the way you come to him?

READ

Isaiah 57:15 · Isaiah 66:1–2

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice why God says he dwells with the contrite and lowly?

Return to Isaiah 57:15. The Holy One doesn't merely tolerate their presence. He says he dwells with them to revive their spirits and hearts.

Now look at Isaiah 66:2. The God who made everything directs his attention toward those who are humble and tremble at his word.

What do these details reveal about the Holy One's intentions toward those who draw near to him?

PRACTICE

Today, practice a small act of humility, such as listening without interrupting, admitting a mistake, or serving someone unnoticed. As you do it, remember that the Holy One draws near to the lowly.

PRAYER

Praise the God who is both high and near. Ask him to give you a humble and contrite spirit that welcomes his presence.

ENCOUNTER 10

The Word Became Flesh

PREPARE

John begins his Gospel with language that reaches back to creation. As you read, notice how he describes the Word, what the Word becomes, and what John and others saw.

PONDER

1. John says the Word was with God and was God, and then that the Word became flesh. What do these claims reveal about the relationship between God's transcendence and his nearness?
2. John says they saw his glory, full of grace and truth. How does this description of glory compare with the glory of the throne room in Isaiah 6? What does it reveal about the character of God that Jesus makes known?

READ

John 1:1–5; 1:14–18

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice the phrase "dwelt among us" in John 1:14? The Greek word echoes the language of the tabernacle, the tent where God's presence lived among Israel.

John is suggesting that in Jesus, God has pitched his tent among us. How does that deepen your understanding of Jesus as the Shepherd who comes near?

PRACTICE

Read John 1:14 slowly, then spend a few quiet moments simply thinking about what it means that the holy, eternal God took on human life. Let the wonder of it settle before you move on with your day.

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for coming near. Tell him what it means to you that the glory of God has a human face, and ask him to help you see the Father more clearly through him.

ENCOUNTER 11

The Lamb Who Is Worthy

PREPARE

In Revelation, John sees a throne, and around it a scene of unending worship. As you read, notice who is worshiped, what is said about them, and how the scene moves from the throne to the Lamb.

PONDER

1. In Revelation 4, the worship centers on the Creator who sits on the throne. In Revelation 5, it centers on the Lamb. What do you notice about how these scenes relate to each other?
2. The Lamb is declared worthy because he was slain and by his blood redeemed people for God. What does this reveal about the identity and character of the Lamb? How does seeing the Lamb receive the worship of heaven deepen your understanding of Jesus, the Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep?

READ

Revelation 4:6–11 · Revelation 5:6–14

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice who joins the worship in Revelation 5:13? Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea offers praise to the One on the throne and to the Lamb.

Earlier, the living creatures proclaimed God's holiness. Now creation itself joins the song. What might this suggest about the future toward which the Shepherd is leading his people?

PRACTICE

Find a few minutes to worship today. You might sing, read a psalm aloud, or sit in silence. Join your voice, however quietly, with the countless voices praising the Holy One and the Lamb.

PRAYER

Worship the Lamb who was slain. Offer him your praise and gratitude, and ask him to give you a heart that delights to join in the worship that fills the universe.

ENCOUNTER 12

Holy and Near

PREPARE

We began this chapter with Isaiah standing before the throne. Along the way we've seen God's glory, his holiness, his demand for purity, and his gracious provision for sinners. As you read, notice how these themes come together in one place.

PONDER

1. These passages invite us to approach God with confidence. What makes that confidence possible? How does it compare with the awe and fear Isaiah felt in the throne room?
2. Think back over the portrait of God you've encountered in this chapter. Which aspect of his holiness has most challenged, surprised, or comforted you? How might it change the way you approach him?

READ

Hebrews 4:14–16 · Hebrews 10:19–23

LOOK AGAIN

Did you notice the word “therefore” that begins Hebrews 10:19? The confidence we're invited to have doesn't rest on our own worthiness. It comes from what Jesus has done.

Now return to Isaiah 6:5-7, where Isaiah stands before the Holy One, recognizes his uncleanness, and receives cleansing he cannot accomplish himself.

Consider these two encounters with God's holiness. What do they reveal about the God who makes it possible for sinful people to enter his presence? How does Christ's work deepen the picture first encountered in Isaiah's vision?

PRACTICE

Take a few quiet minutes to revisit the Scriptures from this chapter.

Choose one image or description of God's holiness that has particularly challenged or deepened your understanding of him. Spend a moment considering that the God whose holiness you've been discovering invites you to approach him through Christ.

Let your response be an act of worship, confession, gratitude, or trust.

PRAYER

Thank God that the Holy One has made a way for you to draw near. Speak with him about what you've learned of his majesty and holiness, and ask him to keep forming in you reverent awe, humble confidence, and a growing desire to be like him.