

Session 5: Holiness

SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

Main Idea: Holiness is not a burden, but a calling to love God and to draw others to him.

Head Change: To know God calls us to be holy—set apart for his purposes.

Heart Change: To feel safe and secure in God's process of consecrating us.

Life Change: To live confidently in our holiness, rather than striving for moral perfection.

OPEN

Would you consider yourself a rule follower or someone who bends the rules? If you are a rule follower, how do you feel when you are asked to break rules? If you are a rule bender, how do you feel when you can't deviate from the rules?

We tend to misunderstand the gospel in two ways. On the one hand, we think that we become holy by following all the rules. On the other, we recognize that our sins are forgiven and may be tempted to think that God's commands no longer matter. But when God calls us to follow him, he both cleanses us of sin and asks us to be obedient.

In the book of Exodus, God continues to form his relationship with Israel by consecrating them—meaning to set them apart for a specific purpose. In this session, we'll hear Dr. Pointer explain what holiness is and what God expects of those he sets apart for his service.

READ

Read Exodus 19:1–13.

Note: *This series touches on parts of the story of Exodus. If you would like to read the whole book of Exodus, check out our daily reading guide in **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Pointer’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What does it mean to be set apart?

How does God describe the Israelites when they keep his covenant?

Show Session 5: *Holiness* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

Dr. Pointer opened with an illustration of tracing a picture. By following the pattern of an original, we can create a unique copy. Similarly, we become holy by forming our lives to the pattern God has set. **What comes to mind when you think of the word “holy”? What behaviors, attitudes, and actions do people typically connect to holiness?**

Three months after their escape from Egypt, Moses and Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai, the exact spot where God met Moses in a burning bush. Read Exodus 3:12 and then read 19:1–6.

Note: *To learn more about Israel’s journey through the wilderness, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

God continually reminded Moses and the Israelites of what he’d done for them. When faced with unwanted or unforeseen circumstances, God asks his people to remember what he has done in the past. As believers, we should do the same when faced with difficult circumstances. God has proved his faithfulness in the past and can be trusted today. **What event in your past has helped you cling to God’s faithfulness? What has God done for you in the past that helps you trust him with future problems?**

How can his past faithfulness give you peace, faith, and confidence today?

Note: *For more on the significance of priests in the Old Testament, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

In Exodus 19, God expresses his desire for Israel to be holy just as he is holy. They were to be distinct, formally set apart for serving God and his purposes. **What has it looked like for you to be set apart as a Christian at work, at home, or in your neighborhood? How does being set apart impact your day-to-day living?**

Note: *To learn about the meaning and importance of being set apart, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

While Israel was set apart from God, they were not holy like God is holy. Read Exodus 19:10–13.

God physically set himself apart from his people and required them to wash their clothes, before appearing before him. The peoples' sin both spiritually and physically separated them from God. Because of Christ, our sin no longer stands between us and God, but it is still important to remind ourselves of God's holiness. **What kind of events or Christian practices remind you of God's distinct holiness?**

We may hear the call to holiness and think we have to try harder, be better, or please God more for him to love us. But holiness is a gift from God that only he can achieve. Through Christ, God has made us holy. He now wants us to live out the identity he has already given to us. **In what ways have you ever tried to earn or achieve holiness? What made you realize it was impossible?**

Effort-based "holiness" often leads us to serve God out of shame or guilt. But God has set us free from enslavement to sin to obey him freely and joyfully. **What does it look like to live a holy life out of love for God rather than in guilt or shame?**

Dr. Pointer reminded us that it is hard to be holy. We can be tempted to believe that holiness is solely about having good morals. But holiness is more than being a good person. Our individual and communal holiness is meant to make us priests. We should be good, yes, but also reflect his holiness to the world around us. **What do you think it means to live as God's priest?**

Toward the end of the session, Dr. Pointer reminded us that holiness is a call to serve others, rather than to tally all the sins we actively avoid. **What could it look like for you to be a blessing to others this week? How can you put the holiness of God on display in your environment through good works?**

Even though God has commanded to do good works, our actions don't make us holy. Our holiness is a state of being given by God through the salvation we received from Christ Jesus. Holiness is the work of God, not of our striving. **What could it look like for you to be faithful to God because you *are* holy, not to become holy?**

LAST WORD

God's holiness does not change, nor does his desire for holiness in his people. And fortunately for us, God did the work of making us holy, allowing us to do good works from a place of grace, rather than obligation. God is not waiting for us to get our act together—he loves us and has already saved us. We now get to live in light of what he has already done.

As his priests, we now get to live in the freedom of serving him. Everything you do can become an act of worship and point people to God. How will you serve him?

GO DEEPER

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Exodus.

1. What happened in the desert?

Session five picked up in Exodus 19, when Israel made it to the Sinai wilderness. But in Exodus 15–16, the people of Israel experienced two different miracles meant to teach them about God's provision. But, in both situations, when they had the opportunity to trust God, the people expressed a lack of faith.

Read Exodus 15:22–27.

Israel journeyed through the desert for three days without water. Only three days after walking through the Red Sea, they started to grumble and complain. **What thoughts do you have about how quickly the Israelites resorted to grumbling and complaining? When have you—like the Israelites—been quick to complain?**

Verse 25 says that God tested his people at the bitter waters of Marah. He provided for his people and told them that if they continued to obey his commands, he wouldn't let any illnesses come upon them, and they would know him as a healer. **What should the Israelites have learned from this test?**

Read Exodus 16:1–20. God provided food for the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. But even with God's miraculous daily provision, the Israelites complained and deliberately disobeyed God. **How do you react when God is not providing for you in the way you want? What comfort do you find knowing that God promises to take care of us each day?**

What can you do to let go of any anxiety you have about his future provision?

We've all been like the Israelites, anxious about the needs of today and the future, but God is trustworthy to give us what we need when we need it. He is our ultimate security blanket. **What have you been asking God to provide for you lately? What could it look like for you to walk in faith that he will come through?**

2. Kingdom of Priests

In this session, we learned that if Israel kept God's statutes, they would be his kingdom of priests. But what is so significant about a priest? What is a kingdom of priests? And why should this matter to us today?

The Old Testament priesthood was reserved for men from the family line of Levi. Priests were responsible for performing the animal sacrifices on behalf of the people and officiating all the other rituals and sacrifices throughout the year. They were a consecrated group of men who wore specific clothes, remained ceremonially clean, and followed unique regulations to remain set apart from the community.

The Israelites were God's kingdom of priests—meaning that the entire community would live out the “priestly” role with their surrounding nations and tribes. Their actions would reveal to the world who God is, and they would point foreigners and strangers to worship him instead of idols. Keeping the statutes of the Lord was not about doing meaningless actions—it was a means of evangelism.

There was also a high priest who acted as a mediator between God and the people of Israel. Aaron, Moses's brother, was the first high priest of Israel. His male descendants assumed his role after his death, approaching God and mediating for Israel as Aaron had done before them. Read Leviticus 16:3–6, 11–17. **What tasks does the high priest perform? What atonement sacrifices must he make?**

Today, we live under a new covenant where we have fellowship with God and the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate high priest who serves as our mediator with God and

made a once-and-for-all atonement sacrifice. Read Hebrews 2:16–18, 5:1–9. **What are the benefits of having Jesus as our high priest?**

How does knowing the role of a priest impact your understanding of what Jesus has done for us?

How will you approach God in boldness this week, knowing that Jesus is there to intercede on your behalf? What could it look like to trust that God hears and cares for you this week?

In 1 Peter 2:9–10, we learn that those who are in Christ are considered a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people of God’s possession. Just like with the Israelites, we are to live as God’s priests in an unbelieving world. We are a living testimony of God’s salvation, love, and faithfulness. **What has it looked like for you to be a living testimony of God’s love? How could you be intentional this week to focus on bringing God glory?**

3. Consecration

To consecrate something is to declare it as sacred, or to set it apart for the specific use of worship or religious devotion. Anything can be consecrated—people, articles of clothing, objects, or even fields.

When we read about consecration in Exodus 19:10–19, Moses is in the process of receiving the Law from God. God instructed Moses to consecrate the Israelites and have them wash their clothes, refrain from sexual relations, and never touch the base of the mountain where God was.

The consecration of the Israelites was an important marker of their faith journey. Following God’s commands would help them realize how special, holy, and unique this event at Mount Sinai was. **What experiences in your own life has made you pause and reflect on God’s holiness?**

Today, we are being sanctified and set apart. Jesus has made us holy through his death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit is making us holy (Colossians 3:1–17; Romans 8:5; 1 Peter 1:2). **What are some examples that come to mind when you think of living set apart for God? What**

does it look like for Christians to live set apart from our culture?

Not only have we been made holy and sanctified, but we will progressively grow in holiness over time with the help of the Spirit of God. **Where have you seen God sanctify you this year?**

While most voices in our culture call us fit in, God calls us to be unique, noticeable, and righteous. Like lights in the darkness, our lives are meant to reveal God's goodness to the world. **What do you believe God has set you apart for? Based on your desires, talents, and relationship with God, what purpose do you believe God has given you to fulfill in this season?**

4. Weekly Reading Plan

Exodus is a long book, and we won't be able to study every verse of it during each of these sessions. This reading plan will help you familiarize yourself with the entirety of the book so that you can dig more deeply into God's Word. Some weeks will have more reading than others, so feel free to complete the daily readings at a pace that makes the most sense to your group.

Day 1: Exodus 16

Day 2: Exodus 17:1–7

Day 3: Exodus 17:8–16

Day 4: Exodus 18

Day 5: Exodus 19