

The Transcendence and Invisibility of God

The God Who Is Far Above Us and Unseen — Yet Truly Made Known

A Teaching Lesson · Seminary-level content, high-school-level clarity

LESSON AT A GLANCE

Big Idea: God is far above and beyond everything He has made (transcendence), and He is a spirit whom no one can see with physical eyes (invisibility). Yet this high and unseen God has truly made Himself known — supremely in Jesus Christ, “the image of the invisible God.”

Memory Verse: *“No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” — John 1:18 (ESV)*

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PART ONE

Teaching Outline (Leader Notes)

This lesson covers two closely related truths about God: His transcendence (He is far above and beyond all creation) and His invisibility (He is a spirit and cannot be seen with physical eyes). These truths guard us against making God too small or too much like ourselves. But they are not meant to leave us in the dark. The whole point of the lesson is that this high and unseen God has graciously made Himself known — in His works, in His Word, and finally in His Son. Part One is your full teaching material; Part Two is a handout to copy for students.

I. Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define transcendence and invisibility in their own words.
2. Explain how transcendence balances with God's nearness (immanence).
3. Give at least two Bible passages for each truth.
4. Explain what it means that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God."
5. Say why an unseen God can still be truly known and worshiped.

II. Part A — The Transcendence of God

What the word means

Transcendence (from Latin *transcendere*, "to climb beyond") means God is high above and beyond His creation. He is not one more thing in the universe, only bigger. He is on a completely different level — the Creator who exists above and apart from everything He has made. His being, His holiness, and His greatness go infinitely beyond us.

The essential balance: transcendence AND immanence. Transcendence says God is far above us; *immanence* (which we saw in the omnipresence lesson) says God is also near and present with us. Both are true at once. The same verse often teaches both: God is "the high and lofty One... who dwells in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit" (Isaiah 57:15).

The Bible's teaching

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

— Isaiah 55:9 (ESV)

- **Isaiah 40:22** — God "sits above the circle of the earth," and its people are like grasshoppers before Him.
- **1 Kings 8:27** — "Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you." God is bigger than the universe.

- **Psalm 113:4-6** — God is “high above all nations,” and stoops down even to look on the heavens.
- **Isaiah 6:1-3** — Isaiah sees the Lord “high and lifted up,” and the angels cry “Holy, holy, holy.”

III. Part B — The Invisibility of God

What the word means

Invisibility means God cannot be seen with our physical eyes. “God is spirit” (John 4:24) — He does not have a physical body like ours, so He is not visible the way created things are. This is why God forbade making images of Him (Exodus 20:4): any picture we could carve would shrink the infinite God down to something false.

A careful distinction for older students: God is invisible in His essence, yet He has truly revealed Himself. In the Old Testament, He appeared in visible signs of His presence — fire, cloud, glory (called *theophanies*). No one saw God’s very essence, but people truly saw signs He gave of Himself.

The Bible’s teaching

“To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

— 1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)

- **John 1:18** — “No one has ever seen God” — but the Son “has made him known.”
- **John 4:24** — “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
- **Colossians 1:15** — Christ “is the image of the invisible God.”
- **Exodus 33:20** — “You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”

The great turning point: Jesus

This is where both truths come together. The transcendent, invisible God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Christ, the God we could never climb up to has come down to us. We do not see God’s bare essence, but in Jesus we truly see who God is — His character, His heart, His love.

IV. Common Confusions (and How to Answer Them)

“If God is so far above us, is He cold and distant?”

No. Transcendence is not distance in the sense of not caring. The same God who is “high and lifted up” also dwells with the lowly and humble (Isaiah 57:15). His greatness is exactly what makes His nearness so amazing — the King of the universe bends down to know and love you. Transcendence should lead not to fear that God is far off, but to wonder that One so great would draw so near.

“The Bible says some people ‘saw’ God. Doesn’t that contradict invisibility?”

Scripture holds both together carefully. When Moses or Isaiah “saw” God, they saw visible signs and glory that God chose to show — not His full invisible essence, which “no one has ever seen” (John 1:18) and which no one could see and live (Exodus 33:20). So there is no contradiction: God revealed real signs of Himself without ever making His infinite being fully visible.

“If God is invisible, can we make pictures or statues to help us worship?”

No — this is exactly what the Second Commandment forbids (Exodus 20:4–5). Any image we make will be smaller and lower than God, and will teach us wrong things about Him. God has given us the way He wants to be known: His Word, and above all His Son. We do not need to invent images; we look to Christ and listen to Scripture.

V. What the Church Has Taught

- **The early church** confessed God as invisible and incomprehensible — beyond full understanding — while insisting He is truly known through His Son and His works.
- **John Calvin** taught that God “accommodates” Himself to us — stooping to speak in ways we can grasp, like a nurse speaking baby-talk — so the infinite God can truly be known by finite people.
- **The Reformed and Baptist confessions** confess God as “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions” (Westminster and Second London Baptist Confessions, ch. 2).

The phrase to memorize: **God is invisible and high above all — and He has made Himself known in His Son.**

A word of caution

Because God is transcendent, we must never drag Him down to our level — imagining He thinks and acts just like us, or shrinking Him to fit our ideas. But because God has made Himself known, we must never treat Him as unknowable or too far away to reach. The error on one side is a God so small He is like us; the error on the other is a God so distant He cannot be known. Scripture avoids both.

VI. The One-Sentence Guardrail

God is high above all creation and cannot be seen with human eyes — yet He has truly and fully made Himself known, above all in Jesus Christ. He is beyond us, but not beyond our knowing.

VII. Why This Matters for Us

- **It teaches us reverence.** A God this high deserves awe and humility. We come to Him with wonder, not with a casual or careless heart.
- **It fuels our worship.** The more we grasp how great and far above us God is, the more amazing it is that He would love and draw near to us.
- **It points us to Jesus.** We cannot climb up to God, so we look to the One who came down. To know Jesus is to truly know God.
- **It teaches faith.** We walk “by faith, not by sight.” Not seeing God with our eyes is not a problem — it is the normal Christian life, trusting the God who has spoken.

PART TWO

Student Handout

The Transcendence and Invisibility of God. Fill in the blanks and follow along as we work through the lesson together.

The Big Idea

God is far above everything He has made (transcendence) and cannot be seen with our eyes (invisibility). Yet this high and unseen God has truly made Himself known — above all in Jesus, “the image of the invisible God.”

Two Words to Know

- **Transcendence** — God is high above and beyond all creation, on a completely different level as the Creator.
- **Invisibility** — God is spirit and cannot be seen with physical eyes.

Two Truths Held Together

Transcendence	God is far above us (Isaiah 55:9; 1 Kings 8:27).
Immanence	God is also near and with us (Isaiah 57:15).
Both at once	The high God dwells with the lowly and humble.

Key Verses

- **Isaiah 55:9** — “My ways [are] higher than your ways.”
- **John 1:18** — “No one has ever seen God” — the Son has made Him known.
- **Colossians 1:15** — Christ is “the image of the invisible God.”
- **John 14:9** — “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

How Do We Know an Unseen God?

- **Through His works** — creation shows His power and glory (Romans 1:20).
- **Through His Word** — God tells us who He is in Scripture.
- **Through His Son** — Jesus shows us the Father perfectly.

Fill in the Blanks

1. “My ways [are] _____ than your ways.” (Isaiah 55:9)
2. “God is _____, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)
3. Christ is “the _____ of the invisible God.” (Colossians 1:15)

4. God is beyond us, but not beyond our _____.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it amazing that a God so high above us would want to be near us?
2. If we can't see God, how can we still truly know Him?
3. What does it mean that Jesus shows us what the Father is like?
4. How does living "by faith, not by sight" actually look in daily life?

One Sentence to Remember

We cannot climb up to God — so in Jesus, God came down to us.

This Week

Memorize John 1:18. Each day, read a short account of Jesus in the Gospels and ask: "What does this show me about what God is like?" Let the invisible God become real to you through His Son.

Sources & Further Study

Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). Key passages and classic sources referenced in this lesson:

- Scripture: Exodus 20:4–5; Exodus 33:20; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 113:4–6; Isaiah 6:1–3; Isaiah 40:22; Isaiah 55:9; Isaiah 57:15; John 1:18; John 4:24; John 14:9; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17.
- John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion I.13 (God's accommodation and self-revelation).
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), ch. 2; Second London Baptist Confession (1689), ch. 2 — God is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.”
- For modern treatment: Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics vol. 2; A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (chapters on God's transcendence).