

## Introduction

Imagine this scenario: A handsome young man walks up to your front door one day. He rings the doorbell, hands you flowers, and asks you to marry him. He tells you that you're everything he's been dreaming of, that you have wonderful character, and a fantastic sense of humor. He says that you and he have the same taste in movies and food, that you share the same hobbies, and you love the same recreational activities. You both love puppies, and he loves the way you laugh. You're about to accept this romantic proposal...until you realize that there is one small problem. You have no idea who this young man is! He looks so nice, and he said everything just right. It was the perfect proposal and the perfect moment. The truth is, though, all his sweet words and compliments mean nothing to you for one reason: He doesn't really know you, and you don't know Him.

Unfortunately, this funny scenario may mirror our relationship with God. We look like good Christians on the outside, and we know all the right words to say. But someday, we'll be the ones walking up to the door, knocking, and the only important question will be whether God knows us or not. On judgment day, we will stand before Him, and we will want to say the perfect words. We'll want to tell Him that we love Him. We'll want to tell Him that He has wonderful character, and that we have the same desires. The question is, will He agree and welcome us into eternity with Him, or will all our words be useless, because we don't really know God? Will we be like the young man proposing to the girl he's never met?

You see, the worst thing I can imagine is getting to judgment day with a list full of accomplishments, but not really know my God. All my outward efforts to please God will be in vain if I don't know the One who gave Himself to save me. I'm terrified of standing before His throne and realizing that, despite all that He did to try to have a relationship with me, I chose not to have a relationship with Him. I don't want to stand before Him and admit that I don't know His heart or His character. I'm afraid of having to tell Him that we have little in common, because I never chose to seek Him or find out from His Word what He truly desires. If I have to stand before His throne and admit that I did not personally know and do His will, then Jesus has already told me what His answer will have to be. "And then I will declare to [you], 'I never knew you; depart from Me...'" (Matthew 7:23).

This study is written help you develop a foundation for building your knowledge of God and your relationship with Him.. So often, teen girls are encouraged just to fix the symptoms of a greater problem. Often it is forgotten that the state of your heart, and the state of your relationship with God is the true battleground. You see, God cares about how you act. He cares about how you dress. He cares about the words you use. He cares if you're worldly. He cares if you engage in pre-marital sex. He cares about whether you choose to work in the church or not. He cares about how you treat others. These are indisputable, biblical facts.

However, you never can successfully complete these actions without being motivated by something deeper. Jesus teaches us this in Matthew 22:37 when He says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment.” This is the greatest commandment, because it is the foundation of every other commandment. I believe with all of my heart that if we fix the sin sickness, the sickness in our hearts, all the awful symptoms will disappear. In other words, if you start by really knowing and loving God, then your daily choices will conform to His perfect will.

In this 12 week study, each section will begin with an overview of a particular characteristic of God. The “Read” section will provide passages on the subject, for you read and study. Then, in the “React” section, you will have the opportunity to react to what you read in the corresponding listing, helping you learn and synthesize your knowledge. Next, in the “Reflect” section, you will get to reflect on what you learned, understanding how to put your knowledge into action, as to build your relationship with God. Last, in the “Relate” section, you will be given the opportunity to relate to your Christian sisters. This section will give you additional thoughts and passages to work through together, further building your knowledge and thoughts.

Though this study can be done solo, it is built to be used in a class setting. Ideally, the goal is to complete a week of the the study your own, and then to discuss and work through additional material with your group. If you are unable to use the study in your congregation’s regular Bible class session, consider building a study group with your friends.

I have attempted to give you the study that I needed so badly when I was a teenager. Please be diligent about it and complete it. Please participate in each provided activity. You’ll be given study help, personal prayer time, reflection, goal setting and relationship building. Please do all that you can, inside and outside of this study, to know God. May we be like Paul, and be willing to give up everything we have to know the one who died for us.

“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

-Philippians 3:7-11



Part One - God Our Creator  
**Week One - Our Authoritative Creator**

Think back to a time when you created something. Maybe you're a photographer and are always taking pictures, or maybe you're a very creative scrapbooker. Maybe you're an artist, or a decorator, or even a builder. Picture in your mind something that you have created. Now, imagine that whatever you created suddenly has the ability to talk, and that it uses its voice to criticize you! For example, imagine a scrapbook page telling you that you have created it poorly, that you used the wrong colors on it, and that you placed too many pictures on one page. Imagine it telling you that it doesn't want to be a scrapbook page, and that you should have made it into wallpaper instead. This idea seems silly, because when you pick up materials to make something, you have the right to make whatever you choose. You're the creator.

I imagine that God feels this way when we challenge His authority. Just as a potter has the right to form his creation just as He wishes, God had the right to form us (and the world around us) just as He desired. Because God is our maker, He has authority over us. God being authoritative over us does not mean that He is harsh, but that He is uniquely in the position of defining right and wrong for us. Unlike us, God was not created (Isaiah 9:6), He never began to exist. Also, God does not need anything to continue existing (Acts 17:25). Isn't that amazing?

We are the complete opposite. We were created by God, and we need God's providence to continue existing. If God did not create us we would not exist, and if He did not create resources for us, and continue replenishing them, we would die (Acts 17:28). God's self-existence alone makes Him greater than we are, and gives Him the right to reign over the His creation. He has always existed and needs nothing, whereas we were created and need to be given everything.

God leads us to submission as our authoritative creator. God leads us to submission in many ways. He encourages submission through His deep love (1 John 4:19), His kindness (Romans 2:4), a reward in heaven (Philippians 3:14), and the terror of separation from Him (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). However, the most basic reason for us to submit to God is because He is our Creator. The parent-child relationship demonstrates this idea to us. Because the parents bring a dependent child into the world, the parents have the right to provide a home, rules, boundaries, relationships and ethics for their children as they provide for their well-being. As the child grows and becomes able to care for himself, he gains more freedom, and eventually is no longer subject to the parent's rules. However, we never grow to the point that we are able to live independently of God. We always are subject to God, as He is always caring for us. God being authoritative over us one of His greatest and most overlooked demonstrations of love.

**Living It Out**

This week, focus on respecting God’s authority. Make a conscious decision to think about Him, and invite Him into every area of your life. As you pray, tell Him you respect His authority as your creator, and tell Him that you are willing to be clay in His hands. As you make decisions throughout the week, remember that all of your decisions should be based off of the perfect character of our authoritative creator. Allow your attitude to change based off of this knowledge, and work to shape your attitude to conform to His perfection. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our authoritative creator, and put this knowledge into action.

**Read**

- (1) Genesis 1
- (2) Jeremiah 18:1-10; Isaiah 64:8; Romans 9
- (3) Isaiah 40; Psalm 100:1-3

**React**

- (1) Write down five things we learn from Genesis 1 about God’s authority over His creation (i.e., Genesis 1:1, God has authority even over time itself).
- (2) After reading about God portrayed as the potter, find a passage discussing each of these areas of our lives over which God has authority: (1) Our roles in the home and the church; (2) Our moral behavior; (3) The plan of salvation; (4) The giving of our lives in service to others.
- (3) Make a chart comparing God’s attributes with ours, from Isaiah 40 (i.e., Isaiah 40:6-7, God gives life, we receive life).

Isaiah	God	We
40:6-7	Gives life	Receive life

**Reflect**

- (1) On every day of creation week, God provided something that was absolutely vital for man to survive. Pick a day of creation and write about what your life would be like if everything God created on that day was taken away from you. (i.e., imagine if God took

away the separation of land and sea that He created on day three. Write about what it would be like to go through your day while swimming instead of standing.) Spend time thanking God for His provisions in your life.

(2) In what areas of your life have you not submitted to the will of God? What changes will you make based on the fact that God has authority over you? Pray about those areas and tell God that you are willing to submit to Him.

(3) Reflect on the greatness of God. What is something you learned about Him from this week's study? How will you let that knowledge work in your life?

### **Relate**

(1) Discuss the days of creation. Notice some new things you noticed while reading Genesis 1, and discuss what impressed you most. Each person give an example of God's awesome power from the Bible.

(2) Discuss practical ways to submit to God as your Creator. How will you go against the grain of society and be a woman of God?

(3) Discuss your charts from Isaiah 40, and compare the power of God with the weakness of ourselves.

Part One - God Our Creator  
**Week Two - Our Loving Creator**

Puppies are the best. They are intelligent, sweet, and adorable. When you bring a puppy home, however, it's not always as fun as it first seems. They're needy, they wake you up in the middle of the night, they chew expensive things, caring for them costs a shocking amount of money, and potty training them is overwhelming. When I got my puppy, I knew these negative things about puppies. I knew it would be difficult and time-consuming, but I decided to get a puppy anyway. When I look at the list of the difficulties caused by a puppy, it makes me wonder why we decided to get a puppy at all. Of course, the reason is because I love animals. I love the companionship of an animal, and I want my future children to have the experience of caring for a pet growing up. You see, my love for puppies outweighed the difficulty I foresaw. Now that my puppy is almost grown, I realize that the benefit of having a well-trained, grown-up dog as my companion—a dog that loves me—made difficulty well-worth it.

On a much larger scale, this is likely how God felt about us. God did not have to create us, but He chose to do it. God demonstrated great love in creation in two ways. First, He demonstrated love by creating a world that was suited perfectly to support our existence. It contained a fulfillment for all of humanity's physical and emotional needs. God never created anything haphazardly, or without infinite wisdom. He created everything in the perfect order for man's existence. The only thing that was missing at the beginning of Adam's life was the companionship of Eve, which God soon provided.

Second, God demonstrated love by creating humanity *at all*. God did not create ignorantly, but He created man knowing that He would sacrifice for the good of mankind. God knew before man was created that we would rebel, and that the only way to reconcile them back to Himself would be great sacrifice. He created mankind fully knowing that we would disobey Him, we would scorn Him, we would mock Him, and that because of our choices we would crucify His own Son. With all of this in mind, the fact that God created us at all demonstrates great sacrificial love. Like a person choosing to get a puppy, already knowing the difficulty lying ahead, God chose to create us.

From the beginning, we have been God's special creation. God treated Adam, and continues to treat us, as such in every way. Because God is our loving creator, we demonstrate His love to others. Being deeply loved by the creator we rebelled against should motivate us to be reconciled to God, and to help others be reconciled as well (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). *All* of humanity is dearly loved by God, and if we have the good news of reconciliation, it is our responsibility to pass it on to others.

### **Living It Out**

This week, focus on giving more love to the Lord. Shape your relationship with Him into much more than grudging obedience, understanding that God uses His authority over you because He loves you so much. Thank God that He created you, and thank Him for all of the things He has done to provide for your health and happiness. Give God the

time and attention that He deserves, putting Him above friends, family, sports, entertainment, school etc. In turn, focus on showing the love of God to the people around you. Let your family and your friends see that God's love rules your life, and that they get to benefit from His love through you. Put others first, go out of your way to help, and especially focus on talking about the love of God with people who do not know it. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our loving creator, and put this knowledge into action.

## **Read**

- (1) Genesis 2
- (2) Genesis 1:26-27; John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:13-20; Ephesians 3:8-12
- (3) 2 Corinthians 5

## **React**

- (1) Provide a verse from Genesis 2 for each of the following:
  - God gave Adam a home
  - God gave Adam food for nourishment
  - God gave Adam tasks for fulfillment
  - God gave Adam rules for his own benefit
  - God gave Adam authority over creation
  - God gave Adam companionship and relationship
- (2) What do we learn about the creator of the universe from the second group of verses?
  - Was God the Father alone in the creation?
  - Who was there with God in the beginning?
  - Through whom was the earth made?
  - For whom was the Earth made?
  - Who holds the earth together?
  - What was the eternal purpose of God?
  - Did Jesus know He was going to have to die when He created the universe?
  - Was it only after man sinned that God came up with the plan for Jesus to die?
- (3) Look up and define the word reconciliation, and the word ambassador. List three characteristics of God (make sure one of them is His love), and write a sentence about how you want to represent God in these ways.

## **Reflect**

- (1) In what ways does God still provide for all of our needs? List five of God's loving provisions for which you are most thankful.



(2) How does it make you feel to know that Jesus created us already knowing He would come and die a cruel death for us? Does it motivate you to love Him, and to help others love Him? Take time to talk to God about your relationship with Him, and thank Him for all of His loving provisions.

(3) Make a list of five people you know who are not reconciled to God. Pray for these people and resolve to reach out to them with the good news of reconciliation. If you are someone who is not reconciled to God, write down the things in your heart that are holding you back from being in relationship with your loving creator, and consider seeking counsel for the Bible and a wise mentor to work through those roadblocks.

### **Relate**

(1) Discuss Old Testament characters to whom God gave special direction, nourishment, housing, etc. God always provides providentially, but the Old Testament is full of God's direct provision. (i.e., Elijah being fed by the ravens, 1 Kings 17:2-6).

(2) Decide on a specific way to serve others this week as a group or as individuals. Think of a brother or sister in Christ who is suffering. Reach out to this person(s) and serve him or her this week.

(3) Tell your group about a person in your life who isn't in relationship with God, and tell them about how you plan to reach out to that person. Resolve to keep each other accountable in your evangelism.

Part One - God Our Creator  
**Week Three - Our Glorious Creator**

Spending time in nature always overwhelms me with appreciation for the glory of God. One of my favorite places to be is in the mountains, especially the Rockies. Looking up and seeing the earth towering above me always puts me in awe of God's strength, creativity, and unique ability. I don't have the ability to create such incredible structures from nothing, I don't even have the ability to make them from the materials around me! God truly is glorious.

The glory of God is a very important theme throughout the Bible. Glory is defined as magnificence or great beauty, but it is also defined as high renown or honor won by notable achievements. In both the Old and New Testaments, God's glory and majesty are described through the act of His creation, the *most* notable achievement. God created the universe because He loves us, but He also created it to display His glory. Though we cannot see the face of God, or have direct interaction with Him, we get to look around and see evidence of His majesty, creativity, wisdom, love, insight and power. Nature itself is a testimony of the powerful God that we serve, and is such a strong testimony that human beings are left with no excuse for denying the existence of a creator (Romans 1:20).

When we think about the glory of God in creation, we are impressed with God's significance, and our own insignificance. This does not mean that we lose self-esteem, but rather we increase in self-esteem. Humbling ourselves under the might of God causes Him to exalt us (James 4:6-10), while seeking self-esteem within our own glory causes disappointment. No matter how smart I am, how well I dress, what great things I achieve, or how pretty I look, someone will always come along who is at least little bit better in one of these areas. If we base our self-confidence in these things, we will be crushed by not being the best. However, if we base our self-confidence in fact that the glorious creator loves us deeply, we can never be deflated by someone else's achievements. People may like us one day and dislike us the next day. We may disappoint ourselves. But God, the greatest Person of all, thinks very highly of us. He created us in His image, and loves us unconditionally.

We must find our self-esteem in the love of our glorious Creator. As magnificent as nature is, the only creation that God deemed "very good" was humanity. Humanity is the crown of God's creation. We are the ones He chose to reflect Him throughout all of the earth. Furthermore, He loved us enough to create us and redeem us. When we search for self-esteem in the glory of God, we will become the satisfied, content, confident women that God created us to be. As we realize the glory of God, and allow the "glory" of ourselves to diminish, we will be overwhelmed with a desire to glorify Him. To glorify God is to praise Him, to describe His glory, and to think of Him in a way that does justice to His greatness. When we exalt God to the correct place in our minds and hearts, our view of ourselves will be transformed, our worship will be given with reverence, and lives begin to reflect God in the way He intended.

## **Living It Out**

This week, let the glory of God transform your worship. Don't consider this a small aspect of your life! The way you worship directly shows how you feel about God. Before you go into worship, take time to examine yourself, and to gaze at the glory of the One you are worshipping. Don't just focus on your Sunday morning worship though, spend time every day in song and worship to Him. We cannot neglect to give God praise throughout the week, and expect our hearts to be right and ready to worship with the assembly on Sunday morning. As you spend more time in worship, your appreciation for His glory, and your own self-esteem will inevitably rise. As you allow God to stand in the place He deserves, the rest of your life will be in proper perspective. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our glorious creator, and put this knowledge into action.

## **Read**

- (1) Job 38-41
- (2) Romans 1:18-23; Isaiah 40:26; Psalm 19:1; Revelation 4:11
- (3) 1 Chronicles 16:8-36

## **React**

- (1) After Job questions God, God tells Job His greatness, to demonstrate that His judgments are unquestionably right. List 10 of your favorite challenges that God makes to Job (i.e.; do you have an arm like God?; Can you thunder with a voice like His?)
- (2) Short answer:
  - What three characteristics of God are displayed in His creation?
  - What two attributes of God uphold the sky?
  - What can we physically look at to see the glory of God?
  - The Lord is worthy to receive what three things, based on His act of creation?
- (3) Write the major points from 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 in your own words.

## **Reflect**

- (1) In what ways do you question God in your life? Do you question Him because you doubt His glory?
- (2) Describe how the glory of God increases our self-esteem, and how building our relationship with God builds us. What changes will you make in your relationship with God and others, based on this proper understanding of self-esteem?

(3) Part of realizing God's glory is glorifying Him in worship. Evaluate the worship that you offer to God. When you come before His throne during worship, are you too tired to glorify Him? Are you too distracted by your friends? Are you thinking about the way you look? Consider your strengths and weaknesses in the way you worship, and pray for the humility to offer worship in spirit and in truth.

### **Relate**

(1) Discuss the lists you created about the differences God points out between Himself and humans. Find other verses that deal with similar ideas.

(2) Discuss your thoughts about finding self-esteem in the glorious creator. Is this what the world teaches young women? Where does our culture want you to find self-esteem? How can young women encourage each other to have true, godly self-esteem? As a group, discuss practical ways to pursue self-esteem in God.

(3) Discuss what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth. Discuss Ecclesiastes 5:1-3, and list ways that we can "guard our steps" when we go into the house of the Lord (e.g., get plenty of rest on Saturday night so that your mind is fresh and awake for worship).

Part Two - God Our Father  
**Week Four - Our Perfect Father**

Some of my favorite childhood memories have to do with my dad. He always helped me and encouraged me to pursue my interests. He would stand for hours outside at my track meets (even when it was raining and cold), and came to all my soccer games. He always stopped to pick up turtles in the road, and spent countless hours cleaning up after and helping provide for my pets. He admired and showed off my artwork, helped me shop for a camera, and always listened to me talk about my ideas and studies. In my mind though, Dad fell short in one main area: He was never around enough. Of course, he was around as much as (and probably more than) than any father could be, but as a kid, it never seemed like enough. You see, Dad had a lot of important responsibilities. He had to provide for me, he served in the church, and he paid attention to my mother and my brother as well. These are all good and necessary activities, but they did take Dad's attention away from me. You see, our human fathers, even the best ones, are *limited*. They can give us their time, but they cannot give us *all* of their time. They can take care of us, but they cannot provide for *every* need. They can love us, but they cannot love us *perfectly*.

God, on the other hand, is our perfect Father. He is able to give us all of His full attention all of the time, He provides for our every need, and He loves us perfectly. It's amazing that such an infinite and perfect being cares to be our Father. In the Old Testament, God is called the father of Israel nine times, and the father of specific people 15 times. That may sound like a lot, but when Jesus came to Earth, He taught us to address God as our personal Father (Matthew 6:9), and does so Himself around 165 times. What an incredible blessing it is to claim the maker of heaven and earth as our personal Father!

As we study about God as our heavenly Father, we must be cautioned with this: God is like our earthly fathers, only insofar as our earthly fathers are like God. Many, like me, have been blessed with fathers who reflect the Lord, but many have not been blessed in this way. Yet we are all the same in that we all had fathers that are not able to reflect God perfectly. Imperfect people can disappoint us, and people, specifically young women, have been disappointed by their fathers. The perfect, infinite heavenly Father never will disappoint us.

No matter what kind of relationship you have with your earthly father, you cannot let it taint your relationship with God. In Matthew 7:7-12, Jesus reminds us of how much God wants to bless us. He is able to give good gifts, and is just waiting for us to ask for them. This incredible love that is given by our perfect father should drive us to respectfully and lovingly treat Him as our very own personal Father. Let us learn to cast all of our cares on Him, and speak to Him from our very heart. Let us strive to grow closer to Him, and love Him in the way every parent desires to be loved by their child.

**Living It Out**

This week, write yourself a note so that you when you wake, you immediately think of God as your father. Make a point to refrain from all social media usage until you've read your Bible, and talked with God like He is your Father. This allows you to hear from God, and for Him to hear from you, just as a Father and child desire. This does not require much time, but it does require you to love the Lord as you love a good earthly father. When you find this love for God, you will frequently and effortlessly go to Him for all you need. Use this week to develop this love and this habit. God loves you and wants this time with you! Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our perfect father, and put this knowledge into action.

## **Read**

- (1) Matthew 5:38-48
- (2) Matthew 7:7-12
- (3) 1 Peter 1:13-22

## **React**

(1) Jesus says in Matthew 5:48: "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Leading up to this statement, He discusses in great detail the way we should treat our fellow human beings. Make a list of the things Jesus asks us to do for people, even our enemies. (e.g., Do not resist an evil person, verse 39.)

(2) As our Father, God is waiting for us to reach out to Him so that He can bless us. God desires relationship with us. Find a passage in the Bible to support each of the following ideas about our relationship with God:

- We must pray in faith
- We must believe that He wants to bless us
- We must cast our burdens on Him
- We must draw near to Him
- We must confess our sins
- We must be consistent in our prayer life

(3) In 1 Peter 1:13-22, Peter discusses the three things (listed above) that the perfection of our Father should motivate us to do. Cite the verse(s) for each point, and write a paragraph about what you learned from this passage.

- (1) Strive for purity
- (2) Love one another
- (3) Treat Him as our Father

## **Reflect**

(1) Think about whether or not your relationships with the people around you reflect God's love. In what areas are you succeeding? In what areas are you lacking?

(2) Evaluate how you feel about God as your Father. Do you view God as vindictive? Harsh? Absent? Indifferent? If your relationship with your earthly father negatively impacts how you feel about your perfect, Heavenly Father, consider a plan of action to correct your view of Him (further study, regular prayer life, seeking wise counsel etc.). Are there important characteristics of God that you know to be true, and yet you have been ignoring them?

(3) How does it make you feel to know that you have a perfect Father who is loving you perfectly? How does it affect your life knowing that you can have a relationship like nothing that is possible with other people?

### **Relate**

(1) Study and discuss why we need to show God's love to the people around us. Consider Matthew 25:31-46 and 1 John 4:7-20.

(2) Read and discuss the passages that you have found about our relationship with God. Discuss how each passage describes a personal, fatherly relationship.

(3) Take time to discuss praying to the perfect Father. Has God answered our prayers by giving us good gifts? Each person share an answered prayer with the group.

Part Two - God Our Father  
**Week Five - Our Helpful Father**

Looking back, I am amazed with how much my dad helped me when I was a child. I already mentioned many things he did for me, but one of my favorites will always be his help with my pets. I had a wide range of pets, from sea monkeys and tadpoles, to snakes and frogs, to rabbits and dogs. Some I only had for a little while, and some I had for my entire childhood. Without Dad, though, I never would have had a pet. Sure, they were my pets, but Dad took care of my pets in ways I couldn't. He did vital things for them, like paying for their food. Building them cages. Taking them to the vet. Taking care of the yard so they had a place to live. Dad even moved an entire woodpile so that my dog wouldn't climb over the fence and escape anymore! To this day, I can call dad and he will do anything for me on the spur of the moment, even when it costs time and money.

If my imperfect, earthly father is willing to sacrifice so much to help me, how much more is my heavenly Father willing to help me? Many Christians are quick to forget that God is on their side. Paralyzed by the terror of His wrath, they are overcome by fear and withdraw from relationship with Him. They forget that the child of God has no need to fear His punishment, as He removes all sin from those who are walking in the light (Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 1:7). Fear of punishment is the opposite of what God desires for His children as they grow in their relationship with Him. God desires a close relationship with His children (James 4:8), and trusting love from them (Proverbs 3:5-6). He desires to protect them (Psalms 34:19) and give them counsel (Psalms 16:7-8).

Because of His Holiness, God *does* promise punishment to those who do not know Him, and do not obey the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8). Contrary to what some believe, however, God does not desire this punishment for anyone. He is a loving and *helpful* Father, who always has been willing to put enormous sacrifice into saving His children. God never has forced His children into relationship with Him, but He has made every possible move to reconcile His children to Himself.

We are to fear the Lord, but not in the way we may fear a cruel, earthly father. In 2 Corinthians 5:10-11 Paul teaches us about a proper fear of the Lord, telling us to fear the Lord knowing that we must stand before His judgement seat. Fear of punishment is a legitimate reason to obey God (Jude 23; Acts 2:37). However, when we are saved, we no longer have to fear hell. In 1 John 4:15-21, we are told that what God has done for us gives us confidence in the day of judgement, and casts out our fear. A proper fear of the Lord comes from realizing our own sinfulness and our need for His grace. This is not the same as being afraid. We should always have a proper fear, knowing that we could stand before the throne unprepared, but we should strive to let God's love cast out that fear, knowing that we can choose to stand prepared, and be confident that we are saved (1 John 5:13). God gives us something we could never earn for ourselves, our salvation. May that drive us to draw near to Him, and to cast all of our cares on our helpful Father (1 Peter 5:7).



## Living It Out

This week, think about the things that you most need help with. These things may include self-discipline, motivation, purpose, attitude or endurance. Remember that God wants to help you with these things, and if you ask Him, He will! Speak with Him about the things you need help with, then look for answers to your prayers. They may not come how you expect them to, but keep your eyes open, because help will come. Pray to God for spiritual strength, wisdom and confidence, knowing that He will grant you those things. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our helpful father, and put this knowledge into action.

### Read

- 1) 2 Peter 3:8-9; Romans 8
- 2) James 1:5-8
- 3) Hebrews 12:4-13

### React

1) 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God desires all of humanity to be saved, and we know that all three Persons of the Godhead worked to make this possible. From Romans 8, find a verse(s) supporting each of these ways in which the Godhead has helped us in our salvation.

God the Father	Working all things together for our good	Not sparing His own Son	Fully adopting us as His own
Jesus the Son	Coming in the flesh	Giving up His life through death	Interceding for Us
God Holy Spirit	Leading us (through His word now)	Giving life	Setting us free

2) Look up and define the two Greek words from James 1 that explain how God will give us wisdom.

3) Find an example of someone in the Bible who God disciplined for his or her own good, and write about the outcome of that punishment.

### Reflect

1) Look at the above chart. How could God do these things to save us, and yet not desire for all of us to be saved? How does this make you feel? Does it help you to believe that God is always *for* you?

2) Write about a time when someone reproached you for doing a good thing. Maybe they were persecuting you on account of righteousness, misunderstanding you, or they promoting themselves by reproaching you. Consider the fact that God will never do any of these things.

3) When bad things happen to us, is it possible that God is disciplining us? If so, is this a harsh and unfair, or a loving, helpful act? In your answer, take into consideration James 1:2-4.

### **Relate**

1) Discuss your chart. Have each person in the group share something they learned about what God has done/is doing for our salvation.

2) Find passages that show how Jesus acted when reproached. Also, consider the persecution endured by various people through the book of Acts. Make a list of how they handled and endured persecution. Finally, discuss the rewards and encouragement God gives, and the rewards He promises, as our helpful Father.

3) Talk about the purpose of discipline. Share your study of Bible characters who that were disciplined, and talk about how God's discipline improved them.

Part Two - God Our Father  
**Week Six - Our Forgiving Father**

When I was growing up, the worst phrase that I could ever hear was, "I'm going to tell your father about this when he gets home." Mom's wrath was impressive, but Dad was the one who could put fear into our hearts! If you have good parents who discipline you as mine did, you will understand this feeling exactly. I remember once convincing my brother to cheat on a math test for me (we were homeschooled), and then creating a ridiculous story to cover it up. Of course, Mom could see right through it. For us, it was enough punishment just to be found out, and for Dad to know what we did. I don't remember whether Dad punished us further, but I know he forgave us quickly. A loving father wants his children to learn from and correct their mistakes. He's willing to punish to teach the child a lesson, but does not hold a grudge against his children, or to cause undue pain or suffering.

God is the ultimate example of a forgiving father. As we have already studied, Genesis 1 and 2 tell the beautiful story of of mankind's perfect relationship with their Father. Adam and Eve lived with their Father who created them out of love and supplied them with fulfillment for their every need. Unfortunately, before we finish reading Genesis 3, we find that, God's children have rebelled against their beloved Father. Fortunately for us though, the rest of the Bible is the extraordinary story of a Father who goes to extraordinary lengths to give humanity the opportunity to come back into relationship with Him.

God must punish sin, and He demonstrated this fact from the beginning. Sin separates us from the Holy God, causing a gap that, without Jesus, could never be bridged. It is essential to notice though, that *before* God punished the first sin, He promised the this possibility of forgiveness. God spoke hope to Adam and Eve before He pronounced the necessary punishment, by promising the sacrifice of Jesus in Genesis 3:15. From the very first sin, our heavenly Father has been a forgiving Father. God fulfilled this promise at just the right time and sent Jesus, His only, unique Son, to be killed by the rest of His creation. As they were nailing Jesus to the cross, He prayed to the Father to forgive them of their sin. Our God is a forgiving God.

As a helpful Father, God desires all men to repent, and as a forgiving Father He makes that possible. We are the ones who rebelled, but God decided to make forgiveness possible anyway. Like a loving earthly father who forgives his child the moment they repent, God forgets the sin of the faithful Christian as soon as he asks for forgiveness. There is nothing more important in this life than obtaining this forgiveness that has been freely offered. Having a forgiving Father should motivate us to make sure we have done what He tells us to, to obtain the forgiveness He longs to give us.

**Living It Out**

Focus on forgiveness this week. Focus on the joy you have in life when you know that your sins are removed far from you. Enjoy the freedom from those sins, and thank God

for the freedom that He gives us. Remind yourself that God truly does not bring your sins to His mind once they are forgiven, and that He is happy and excited to be able to grant us that forgiveness. Return this beautiful forgiveness to the people around you, forgiving those who ask, and overlooking weaknesses. If there are any unforgiven sins in your life, make sure that you do what it takes to obtain that forgiveness. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our forgiving father, and put this knowledge into action.

**Read**

- (1) Romans 5:6-11; Romans 6:1-7
- (2) Psalms 103:1-14; 1 John 1:5-2:6
- (3) 1 John 2:7-11; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35

**React**

- (1) Short answer from Romans 5:6-11 and Romans 6:1-7
  - How did God demonstrate His love to us?
  - Did He do it because we deserved it?
  - By what are we justified?
  - How are we reconciled?
  - How are we saved?
  - How do we partake in Jesus' death?
  - What does this action figuratively represent?
  - When we are raised from this figurative burial, in what do we walk?
  - How do we become united with Him?
  - What do we do with our old self?
  - To obtain our Father's forgiveness, what must we be set free from?

(2) Write down 10 things we learn about the forgiveness of God from Psalms 103:1-14 and 1 John 1:5-2:6 (e.g., we must walk in the light to obtain it).

(3) Place a checkmark beneath what the Bible teaches about the relationship between giving and getting forgiveness.

A Person Who...	Forgiven of God (abides in light)	Not Forgiven of God (abides in darkness)
Forgives his brother		
Hates his brother		
Does not forgive his brother		
Loves his brother		

## **Reflect**

(1) Think about what God has done to forgive us, then think about what we have to do to obtain forgiveness (from Romans 5-6). Who has the more difficult part? God has already done his part, but have we done ours? Write a paragraph about what is required for us to receive forgiveness of sins, then write a paragraph about how much you have done to obtain that forgiveness.

(2) After we partake in Jesus' death through baptism, we have continual cleansing and complete removal of sins. How does it make you feel to realize our full and simple access to complete forgiveness in God? Are there unforgiven sins you haven't asked God to take care of?

(3) God expects us to forgive as He does. It's impossible to think that we can get full forgiveness from God while withholding the same from others. Reflect on whether or not you are a person who offers forgiveness.

## **Relate**

(1) Study about and discuss what the blood of Christ does for us, and how we can obtain it. Consider the passages we studied in Romans, as well as Acts 2:22-47, Hebrews 9:11-14, Ephesians 1:3-14.

(2) Discuss and compare the 10 things that you discovered about God's forgiveness. Remember to look deeply into these passages, because there are more than 10 truths about forgiveness here!

(3) Consider the parable from Matthew 18:21-35, and think about whether or not you are preventing God from forgiving you by withholding forgiveness from another person who wants your forgiveness. Also, read Luke 17:3-4 here. As a group, discuss this, and pray for forgiving hearts. Encourage each other to forgive, and discuss truths that make it easier to forgive others.

Part Three - God Our Knower  
**Week Seven - Our Intimate Knower**

I'm willing to guess that everyone reading this desires to have relationships with other people. When we look for friends, we look for people who have similar interests as ours, so that they can understand us. We all long to be known. It's a basic human desire. We long for friends to share secrets with, parents who understand what we're feeling, and to find (someday) a partner to spend our life with. We want this person to know everything about us. The reason we desire this intimacy with other people is so that we can trust them. If a friend knows our heart, they won't think poorly of us when we confess a fault. If our parents know our emotions and our struggles, they will deal gently with us when we make mistakes. When we find a lifelong partner who knows us, we are able to be fully ourselves around them without fear of judgment. We want to belong, we want to trust, and we want to be known.

No human can ever know us completely. Even our closest friends and confidants are limited in their understanding of us, and we are limited in what we can convey to them about ourselves. In fact, without God we can't even know ourselves. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us this: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" This doesn't mean that we can never know the truth about ourselves, but rather that we need God's mirror, the Bible (James 1:22-25) to see clearly. The intimacy that we long to share with human beings (including ourselves) is never *completely* satisfying. We can have good, wonderful, and intimate relationships, but we can never be fully known by anyone apart from God, nor can we fully know (1 Corinthians 13:12).

God offers us the only fully satisfying relationship there is. We are like cars, and God is the gasoline. We were created to be run on Him, to enjoy intimate relationship with Him. God knows everything there is to know about us: our hearts, our plans, our desires, our sins, our thoughts, and even the numbers of the hairs on our heads! This deep love and intimacy should drive us to know God, as fully as we can.

Returning God's intimacy will allow us to be satisfied in Him, but it will also help us to have more satisfying earthly relationships. If we are satisfied in the fact that God fully knows us, we won't try to make others know us fully. While I love my husband, he never can know me as well as God can. Try as he might, my husband never can remember everything I ever have said, or know everything there is to be known about me, but God can. When we aren't expecting others to fill roles they cannot fill, we will be satisfied in the roles that they *can* fill. As we become more intimate with God, we also become more intimate with ourselves. Knowledge of God also helps us overcome our own deceitfulness, so that we can be more satisfied in our relationships with ourselves (James 1:22-25). Our relationship with God is a completely unique relationship that transforms every aspect of our lives.

**Living It Out**

As you go through the week, be conscious of the relationships in your life that are holding you back. Maybe you rely too much on your parents, asking them to do things for you that you could do for yourself. Rely more on God and find strength and motivation in Him. Maybe you tell your troubles to a friend first, but you don't run to God. Make God your first priority, and cast your care upon Him first. Maybe you're in a relationship that drags you down. Turn to God to fulfill your needs, and reevaluate the relationship you are in. Use the word of God to see these clearly. As you learn to rely on God, all of your other relationships are put into perspective. This week elevate your relationship with God so that these relationships can be put in their proper place. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our intimate knower, and put this knowledge into action.

### **Read**

- (1) Psalms 139
- (2) John 4:7-30
- (3) Luke 12:6-7; John 2:23-25

### **React**

- (1) Write down 10 things from Psalm 139 about God being our intimate knower.
- (2) Compare and contrast what Jesus knew about the Samaritan Woman versus what the Samaritan Woman knew about Jesus. The Savior knew personal and "impossible" things about her, whereas the Samaritan Woman didn't know things that were possible for the average person to know. For example:

Jesus Knew:

-The state of her marital relationship

The Samaritan Woman Didn't Know:

-The gift of God

- (3) Does Jesus know about our external selves or internal selves? Write a paragraph about what God knows about us.

### **Reflect**

- (1) Write down five things that you love and appreciate about God. Take time to reflect on what you know about God's love for you, from Psalms 139.
- (2) When you think about the fact that God knows all about us, even our every sin, it makes confession of sin all the more urgent. Is there anything that you need to confess to God? In what area(s) of your life may you be deceiving yourself?

(3) Are you expecting too much out of some relationships in your life? How can you be more satisfied in your relationship with God, and put all other relationships in their proper place?

### **Relate**

(1) Think of other Bible passages that support some of your favorite points in Psalms 139. Share and discuss these passages.

(2) Discuss the need for confessing sin. Why does God expect us to confess, even though He knows our sin even before we commit it? Consider passages like 1 John 1:5-10, John 9:39-41 and Psalm 32:1-7. Think of Bible characters that had to confess their sins, as well as New Testament passages that deal with confession.

(3) Share your paragraphs about God knowing our external and internal selves, and discuss areas of your inner and outer life that you would like to take better care of.



Part Three - God Our Knower  
**Week Eight - Our Wise Knower**

Imagine this scenario: You're jolted awake from a peaceful night's sleep to the sound of your father yelling from the front yard. You jump up, look down out of the window, and see your father standing two stories below. In the midst of all of the confusion, you figure out that he is ordering you to jump from the window. You can't believe it! You were happily resting, and now your father has awoken you, and is asking you to do something that is quite harmful to you. You may be angry, but what you don't realize is that your father has much more knowledge about your situation than you do. From his vantage point, he sees that the ground level of the house is on fire, and there is no other way out. If you don't jump you will certainly die. Because of your limited point of view, you can't see what your father sees, and it turns out that it is much better to trust your father who can see the big picture.

This scenario is very similar to our relationship with God. Because God is the Creator Who always has existed, right and wrong are determined by His nature. God's determinations as to what is right and wrong are not arbitrary or designed to keep us from having a good life. He bases right and wrong on perfect character and infinite wisdom. Because He created us and fully knows what is best for us, it's for our own good that He makes rules for our lives (Jeremiah 10:23; John 10:10). Just as gravity holds us to the ground, God's law holds us to what is fundamentally right. Just like in the scenario about the burning house, it is so much better to trust the One who can see the big picture!

Because God is the only wise God (Romans 16:27), the very standard of right and wrong, we should trust Him to guide us. When we looked at God as our Creator, we realized that God had the *right* to tell us what to do simply because He created us. Now, we realize that God has the *ability* to tell us what is right, because He is the wise knower. He knows everything about us, and everything about the past, present, and future. I trust someone with that kind of knowledge to make decisions for my life—I trust Him infinitely more than I trust myself.

Even though we may not understand fully God's rationale for some of His rules, we can understand that God made them with a perfect view of everything, which we are completely incapable of doing. God as our wise knower should drive us to joyfully submit to Him, realizing that submission to God is the only way to true happiness and success in life. The fact that God is wise enough to make these rules, and cares enough about me to give them to me, makes me love Him all the more.

### **Living It Out**

Make a conscious effort this week to stand in awe of the wisdom of God. Write out one of the passages to be considered, and put it on your mirror or somewhere you will see it. Remember that He knows *everything*, everything about the world, history, and our lives. Have this thought in your mind as you face different challenges this week, and use

this knowledge to submit to Him. When we are truly convicted that God knows best, it makes submission easier. When we know in our hearts that God is wiser than we are, it motivates us to obey, even when our way seems better to us. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our wise knower, and put this knowledge into action

## **Read**

- (1) 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 16:1-9
- (2) Psalms 19:7-14
- (3) Matthew 20:1-16; Genesis 18:25; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

## **React**

(1) Write about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Contrast what the cross means to the non-Christian versus what the cross means to the Christian. Without God revealing His wisdom to us, would we be able to be saved? Would we understand how to be saved just by looking within ourselves? Can we make our own way to heaven?

(2) List the results of trusting in the Lord, from Psalms 19:7-9.

(3) God is a righteous and trustworthy judge, even when His directions do not make sense to us. Find five more verses about the righteousness of God, or God as our righteous judge.

## **Reflect**

(1) Does the world want you to rely on yourself, or to rely on God? In whom do you trust, God or yourself? List ways that you succeed in trusting God, and ways that you fall short.

(2) If you have trouble trusting in God's ways, take time to look at the track record of God. Find one Old Testament account in which God proved trustworthy, and think of one time in your life when you followed God despite the difficulty, and it worked out for the best.

(3) Imagine how the world would be if you made all of the rules for it. Are you wise enough to tell everyone the right thing to do? Do you know what is best for every situation?

## **Relate**

(1) As a group, create a top 10 list of practical ways to put more trust in God, and less trust in yourselves.

(2) Find and discuss Biblical characters who trusted in God's way over their own way. Look at God's provision for their lives. Does God have a good track record of doing what was best for those who trusted in Him?

(3) Think about people in your life who are going through tough times, and may need a reminder to trust in God and His way. Send cards to these people. In each card, write a scripture to remind them of trustworthiness and faithfulness of God.

Part Three - God Our Knower  
**Week Nine - Our Planning Knower**

Young women often are fascinated with the idea that God may have a specific plan for their lives. If you have Christian friends, I'm going to guess that you have discussed whether God has a plan, and what that plan might be. It's comforting to think about someone greater than ourselves directing our course, especially when we find ourselves in the midst of decision making, life planning, and big steps. I've often wondered if God has a plan He wants me to follow, and if there are specific choices I need to make to follow God's perfect plan for me. I don't know everything in God's mind, or all of His ways. What I do know, however, is that God is infinitely wise, that He works all things in my life together for my good (Romans 8:28), and that He has a beautiful plan for my life (and yours) that He has made quite clear.

God has been a planner from eternity. Paul tells us about the clear plan He has for our lives in Ephesians 3:8-11: "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him." The church, bought by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), was God's purpose before the beginning of time. God set this perfect and intricate plan in motion as soon as man sinned (Genesis 3:15). Because God never had a beginning, there was never a time when the church entered the mind of God. The existence of humanity, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the community of the redeemed (the church) have always been God's plan.

When I realize that God planned from all eternity to make a way by which I could obey Him and go to heaven, then I am no longer worried about trying to discern whether God has a specific, point-by-point plot for my life to follow. Rather, I read His revealed will for my life in the Bible and determine to follow it. He planned out a sacrifice for our salvation, and a way for us to dwell in His kingdom while living on earth. No specific plan for our lives could be as precious to us as this!

Living inside of God's revealed plan should be the only response to our planning knower. He created the church as an environment in which we may live, work, share, and worship. When we seek first this kingdom of God, we are able to truly find our purpose and meaning. When we live out the gospel plan that we know God has for our lives, we open ourselves up to all the blessings that God longs to bestow on us. Submitting to the ways of God is the first step to a lifetime of fulfillment, as the God who knows infinitely also knows what is best for us.

**Living It Out**

This week, make sure that you find a new way to be a part of God's revealed plan. If you are not in His kingdom, learn how to become a part of it. If you have never taught a class, sit in with a teacher on Wednesday night and assist. If you don't talk to people who aren't your age, pick a widow who may need some encouragement, and spend a few moments speaking with her. If you've never sent a card, send a card to someone who is suffering. If you've never invited someone to church, make this the week to do it. All of these actions seem small, but can have eternal impacts on your soul, and on the souls of others. The only way to be a christian is to seek first His kingdom! Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our planning knower, and put this knowledge into action.

### **Read**

(1) Romans 10:13; John 6:44; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 2:38, 17:30; Romans 10:9-10; Romans 6:3; 1 Peter 3:21

(2) Ephesians 5:15-20; John 14-16

(3) Hebrews 13:15-25

### **React**

(1) Write down what is necessary to become a part of God's plan for salvation.

(2) Can we understand the will of the Lord? If we couldn't understand the will of the Lord, wouldn't that imply that the Holy Spirit failed in communicating to us? Specifically study John 14:16-17 and John 16:5-15 and answer the following questions.

(1) Who is speaking?

(2) To whom is He speaking?

(3) About whom is the subject?

(4) What does Jesus say about the mission of the person He describes?

(5) Does the person Jesus describes have the ability to complete His task?

(3) Who equips us to do the will of God? How does He do it? List five things from this passage that are His will.

### **Reflect**

(1) Have you followed God's plan for your salvation? Are you active in the church? Do you attend services faithfully, participate in the work, and get to know your fellow Christians? Write about one area in which you are very faithful, and one area in which you would like to be more faithful. May we expect God to work things out for our ultimate good when we are not faithful to His eternal and explicit plan for our lives? (Romans 8:28).

(2) How seriously do you take the Bible, which is the revelation of the Holy Spirit? Write down one topic about which you would like to know more, and seek wise counsel that will guide you in your study of the scripture about that topic.

(3) Write a paragraph about where you desire to be spiritually in the next five years. What do you want to be different in five years? What are you going to do to get there?

### **Relate**

(1) Share your new Christian venture with the group. Allow the group to hold you accountable for this decision, and keep them updated on the success of your new Christian act.

(2) Read and discuss Acts 2, and understand it as the beginning of what Jesus promised His Apostles in John 14-16.

(3) God has a will that is sovereign (what He desires, and He will make it come to pass no matter what, i.e., the flood of Noah). God also has a will that is preceptive (what He desires, but will not force it to come to pass, i.e., that all men will be saved). As a group, make lists of things that fall into his sovereign will, and things that fall into his preceptive will. Use Biblical events, and things that are happening in the world today.

Part Four - God Our Savior  
**Week Ten - Our Submissive Savior**

When I was a teenager, I found it increasingly difficult to submit to my parents. Looking back, I see that it is partially understandable for me to have struggled with this. After all, God's will is for us to grow up and leave our parents' home and become independent. As we become more independent, it may become more difficult to submit. What I didn't realize enough as a teenager, though, is that no matter how independent I became, I could never, and would never really want to, escape from submission. This is because submission is at the very core of Christianity. Without submission, becoming a Christian and living a Christian life are both impossible. To be a Christian means admitting your lack of self-sufficiency, and giving up one's own will to follow the will of the One who is self-sufficient.

Being a submissive person is a high calling, but God doesn't expect this grand character quality without first demonstrating it to us. Though God is perfect and powerful, meaning that He never *had* to submit to anyone, He chose to demonstrate submission anyway. God the Father and God the Son are equals in every way, and yet God the Son chose to submit to the will of His Father by coming to earth to die on the cross. This was the most beautiful and beneficial act in all of the world, and it was an act of submission (Hebrews 5:8; Philippians 2:8). When we choose to submit to God, we are choosing to imitate the selfless act that reconciled us to our Creator, Father, and Knower. God never had to submit, but chose to do so because He loves us.

Today's culture tells us that we are self-sufficient, and that authority is unnecessary and cruel. However, submitting to God's authority is for our own good. This is demonstrated through the parent-child relationship. Even as a teenager, when my parents laid down rules for me, they were not being cruel, but were teaching me to live according to the rules of the world, while protecting them from harm. Curfew is the perfect example. When your parents order that you be home by a certain time, they are allowing you freedom while still protecting you from the danger of being out late at night. This is what God does for us when He enforces rules: He teaches us how to function in the world He created, while keeping us safe from harm. When we refuse to submit, we are like a child who puts himself in harm's way. Use your teenage years to practice Christian submission with your parents, allowing them fulfill their God-given role of teaching you and helping to keep you safe.

Start submitting to your parents and to God now, not only because it is commanded (Ephesians 6:1-4), but also because your love for the submissive savior drives you to submission. Use this time to practice submission, and to think about the submission that you will practice in the future as well. As Christians, we are commanded to submit to each other out of love, in order to keep the bond of unity (Ephesians 5:21). As women, we are commanded to submit in the home (Ephesians 5:22-24), and in the worship assembly (1 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Though society tells us that choosing submission is weak and unnecessary, choosing submission is a beautiful opportunity to imitate what Jesus did when He died for us. As women, we have a

special opportunity to die to ourselves in this way. Just as the Father and the Son are equals, men and women are equals. Just as Jesus chose to take the submissive role to accomplish His Father's will, so women get to choose to take the submissive role, also accomplishing our Father's will. Let the fact that God is our submissive Savior drive us to submit to Him, as Christians submit to other Christians' biblical teaching, and as women to Biblically submit to men.

### **Living It Out**

This week, praise God for His model of submission. Thank Him that the most beautiful act on earth, the act that brought us close to Him, was an act of submission. Pray for a submissive heart, and pray that you too can change lives through submission. Practice this grand act with your parents. Adjust your attitude to the attitude of Jesus and adjust your actions to mimic Jesus. Let your parents see Christ living inside you this week, as you focus on giving up your own will, and taking on the will of Jesus. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our submissive savior, and put this knowledge into action.

#### **Read**

(1) Philippians 2:1-11; John 6:37-40

(2) Matthew 26:36-46; Hebrews 5:7-10

(3) Ephesians 5:15-33; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:9-15

#### **React**

(1) List five things that Jesus did because He submitted to the will of His father.

(2) Answer the following questions: (1) What did Jesus ask of God? (2) How deeply was His soul grieved over what He was requesting? (4) What phrase did He use to modify His request? (5) Did God hear Jesus when He prayed this prayer? (6) Did Jesus receive what He asked for? (7) What did Jesus learn from what He suffered? For each question, supply an answer and a supporting verse from either Matthew 26 or Hebrews 5.

(3) Submission is necessary for a family and a church to function. When human beings (who are of equal value in the eyes of God) choose to work together, someone has to have the final "say so." (For example, elders in the church have the final "say so" in areas where the Bible leaves open for judgement.) When two marriage partners disagree about what to do, someone must have the authority to make the final decision, or there will be deadlock. Complete this chart to understand the sacrificial roles of both men and women in a marriage.



Verse	Who?	What?	How?
Ephesians 5:22		Submit	
Ephesians 5:23			As Christ is the head of the Church
Ephesians 5:24		Be subject	
Ephesians 5:25	Husbands		
Ephesians 5:28			As their own bodies, as the Lord loves
Ephesians 5:33		Loves	
Ephesians 5:33	Wives		

## Reflect

(1) Take time to think about the Christian and submission, and decide if you think of submission as a positive or negative act. If you think of it as a negative act, as being weak or bad, pray that you will reframe your mind to see submission as the beautiful act that reflects Jesus. If you see submission as a God- and self-affirming act, pray that you will continue to improve in your ability and desire to submit to God.

(2) Jesus accomplished the most important act in all of the world by submitting to God. What great acts do you want to accomplish through submission to God? Write down some of your life's goals, and consider how submitting to the will of God will help you to accomplish them.

(3) Pray about your future marriage. Write down the qualities you are looking for in a husband, focusing on what you learned about a godly husband from Ephesians 5. Pray that you will have a heart that wants to submit to a godly man some day, and that God will help you find a godly man when the time is right.

## Relate

(1) Read about the crucifixion from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Discuss how difficult submission to God must have been for Jesus, and how grateful you are that God gave you the opportunity to model Christ's submission in your own life.

(2) Share about your life's goals with each other. Discuss what you can do as a group to form the character to accomplish the goals you desire.

(3) When a woman chooses to take a submissive role in the worship assembly, that does not make her, or her role, inferior or less important. Take the time, as a group, to

make an extensive list of all the things a woman *can* do in the church, in service to the Lord.

Part Four - God Our Savior  
**Week Eleven - Our Sympathetic Savior**

My husband is one of the most sympathetic people I know. He takes care of me when I'm not well, he talks with me when I'm upset, and he comforts me when I'm sad. He's also one of the most level-headed people I know, and so I'm sure my emotions leave him confused more often than not! Even when he doesn't understand what I am feeling, he always cares. He always is there for me, and always wants to help me. Having someone to sympathize with us is one of God's greatest gift, and a blessing we all desire. Even better than the sympathy of my husband, though, I have the sympathy of my Savior. I have a Savior who can sympathize with my weaknesses, and who knows exactly how I feel in every situation (Hebrews 4:15).

God is so good to sympathize with us. We are frail and weak, and God is powerful and strong. Yet, He cares enough about us to sympathize with us. God always has offered comfort to His people. Beginning in the Old Testament, God offers His children a peace of mind that never could be found anywhere else (Psalms 23). God offers freedom from fear and death. The daughter of God has complete assurance of God's providential care and provision while she is living, and complete assurance of salvation and a home in heaven after death.

God has given us the gift of friendship as a way of comfort as well. When we are suffering, the church provides a context of trusted and likeminded people who can provide us with counsel and comfort. The people in our lives who provide the best comfort usually the people who understand us and our plight. They are the people who have suffered something similar to what we are suffering, and therefore can give us empathy, comfort, and advice from their own personal experience. As we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we find that God doesn't only offer comfort, but He offers empathy.

When we get to the New Testament, we find out that Jesus is our sympathetic savior and friend. He understands pain, temptation, sickness, sadness, hunger, loneliness, betrayal, separation, dread, exhaustion, agony and death. Jesus can offer us comfort and understanding like none other, because He truly knows what it is like to be us. Not only can He offer us comfort, but can offer us justification. Jesus always begs God on our behalf. We do not serve a God who judges us harshly, but a God who judges us based upon an understanding of our struggles. Jesus' empathy should drive us into deeper relationship with Him. Jesus loves us so much and desires to be our friend, One Who can empathize with our trials, temptation, and suffering.

**Living It Out**

Make a conscious effort this week to bring your emotions to God. Life can be an emotional rollercoaster, especially for girls, but God is here to sustain us through. Don't wallow in your emotions, and do not act on emotions without taking them to God. God wants us to use our mind to steer our emotions, just as we steer a car with a steering

wheel. Furthermore, God wants to guide our minds. He wants to drive the car! Allow His word to keep your emotions on track, and act on what you know to be true, not on what you feel. When your emotions are on track, you are free to offer support and guidance to the people around you. Be a sympathetic friend to those who need you. Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our sympathetic savior, and put this knowledge into action.

### **Read**

- (1) Psalms 23; Psalms 119:76; Philippians 4:5-7
- (2) Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 2:3-6
- (3) 2 Corinthians 1:1-11; Galatians 6:2; James 5:16

### **React**

- (1) From the above readings, list 5 comforting things that God offers His children.
- (2) Answer the following questions and provide a verse to support each answer.
  - Why can Jesus sympathize with our weaknesses?
  - Did Jesus fall short and sin like we do?
  - Should we feel intimidated or confident because Jesus endured everything we do but didn't sin?
  - What two things do we receive in times of need?
  - Who does Jesus deal gently with?
  - Does Jesus being beset with weakness mean that he sinned?
  - What does Jesus do between God and man?
- (3) The result of receiving comfort and understanding from God should be giving that comfort and understanding to others. Write about what you learned concerning comforting others, from the above passages.

### **Reflect**

- (1) Many Christian women deal with anxiety and depression. Though there are sometimes physical and chemical reasons for these, often, we are all too quick to turn to doctors before we turn to Christ. If you struggle with either of these things, take time to *make sure* that you are living the Christian life so that you can enjoy the comfort of Christ. How regular is your prayer life? Do you turn to God's word daily? Are you enjoying the support and fellowship of your Christian brothers and sisters?
- (2) How does it feel to know that you have a Savior Who loves you and empathizes with you? Think about the precious blood of Christ. Read 1 Peter 1:17-19, and pray that you will live in such a way that honors the blood of Christ as priceless treasure that it is, and that you will use Jesus as your mediator in all things.

(3) Is your life characterized by service to others? Do you use the comfort of God to comfort others? Write down the ways in which you are doing well in this area, and ways in which you wish to improve.

## **Relate**

(1) Develop a plan for daily Bible study and prayer. If you are not developing your relationship to God daily, start small, and commit 15 minutes a day to Him. After you have made a habit, increase the time you spend with God. As a group, discuss your plans, and form accountability groups to help you stick with you plan.

(2) Find more verses that discuss our salvation by the blood of Christ.

(3) Discuss the difference between empathy and sympathy. Have you been through some circumstances in life that will allow you to empathize with others? Discuss them.

Part Four - God Our Savior  
**Week Twelve - Our Sacrificial Savior**

When Caleb and I were in the first few months of marriage, I found myself overwhelmed with life. As wonderful as this time was, I was overwhelmed by the many life changes that I was facing. One of these challenges was the beginning of graduate school. This challenge escalated one day when I was under pressure to complete some assignments, and my destructive new puppy decided to destroy my computer cord, preventing me from charging my computer. Because of schedule conflicts, I thought I was going to be unable to complete my assignments and login to class. A sweet older (and very tech-savvy) man at church caught wind of this and offered to try to fix it. After realizing the cable was blown completely, he somehow managed to get us a new one and delivered it to our door at 7:00 the next morning. Because of this man's sacrifice, I was able to keep up with what I needed to do. He didn't have to do this for me, but he chose to sacrifice himself to help me. There is nothing more beautiful in the world than self-sacrifice. Needless to say, Jesus' act of self-sacrifice was the most beautiful act in the world.

Sacrifice always has been necessary to atone for sin. To atone means to make amends, or repair a broken relationship. Because sin is not tolerable to our perfect and holy God, it cannot be simply "ignored." Sin has to be punished, and this is the basis of the justice of God (Psalms 89:14; Isaiah 59:2). The sinner *deserves* to be punished; we deserve the punishment for our own sin. Because Jesus loves us so deeply, though, He doesn't want us to be lost in hell ourselves. He wants to have restored relationship with us because He loves us so much. Because of this, He chose to take on the punishment Himself. He didn't have to give us the option of reconciliation, but He chose to do it. God is the one who requires a sacrifice for the sinner, but God is also the one who *supplied* a sacrifice for the sinner. He is both the just and the justifier (Romans 3:26). He is the Judge Who pronounces the sentence and then takes the punishment Himself (Isaiah 53:4, 10; Romans 4:25; 8:32). He chose to sacrifice Himself.

Because Jesus chose to justify us from our sin, we must realize that our good works do not merit our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). We never can do enough to justify ourselves, and we never can do enough to deserve the justification that Jesus offers. So why then do our actions matter? Hebrews 10:29 explains that the blood of our sacrifice is so precious, that to go on sinning willfully after obeying God is to trample under foot the precious blood of Christ, and scorns His sacrifice. Though we can't earn our salvation, the way we choose to treat the blood of Christ *does* effect our salvation.

When we realize how precious the sacrifice of Jesus is, and we realize that our sin scorns that sacrifice, the only imaginable response is to strive to be pure and holy in our lives (Titus 2:10-11). Jesus' willing self-sacrifice should not only drive us to purify our lives, but also to live lives of self-sacrifice for both God and the people He created.

**Living It Out**

Use this final week to focus on purifying your life. Truly knowing God can never happen without a reaction. When we gaze at the sacrifice of God, we should be overwhelmed with a desire to live purely before Him, so that we never scorn the sacrifice. Take drastic measures this week to get impurity out of your life, if need be. Do you use your phone for impurity? Give it to your parents and allow them to choose when you have it. Do you have friends who lead you to be impure? Speak with them about your concerns, and distance yourself from their influence. Are your entertainment choices filled with impurity? Use this week to detox from television, and re-evaluate your choices at the end of the week.

Use the following readings and exercises to learn more about God as our submissive savior, and put this knowledge into action.

### **Read**

(1) Romans 3:21-31; Hebrews 10:26-30

(2) Isaiah 53; Hebrews 9:11-28

(3) Luke 9:23-25; Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 3:7-10

### **React**

(1) In your own words, write about the relationship between our works and our salvation. Can we earn our salvation? Do our actions affect our salvation? Use at least two verses not mentioned.

(2) Describe in your own words, from the listed verses, what Jesus suffered for us.

(3) As imitators of Christ, we are to be sacrifices ourselves. This is described as a type of death. List five different ways this is phrased in the above verses.

### **Reflect**

(1) Think about how you view obedience and works. Do you view these things as trying to earn your salvation, or do you view them as unimportant? Either extreme is harmful to the Christian life. Pray about your view of them, and write down ideas about how to keep the proper view.

(2) How does it make you feel to realize that your Creator chose to suffer and die for you? Does this motivate you to live your life for Him? Take time to thank Him for His sacrifice.

(3) Write down five specific ways in which you want to be a living sacrifice, and die to yourself.

## **Relate**

(1) What does the religious culture today say about our faith and our works? During Jesus' time, how did the Pharisees view this topic? Discuss and contrast what a life that is lived in either extreme would look like.

(2) Read about the crucifixion from a different gospel account than you previously did. Discuss ways in which to focus on and lift up the cross in our daily life. The cross is central to Christianity, but is all too often forgotten.

(3) Since being a living sacrifice means sacrificing yourself for others, pick some people who need your help, and figure out the best way to help them as a group. Could you babysit at the church building for young parents who need a night off? Is there a shut-in who needs some yard work done? Could you make some easy casseroles as a group to take to the sick? Though these things might take some time, they are important acts of sacrificial service.