



Love and Truth: Navigating Relationships with God's Grace

by Jim and Christa Lord

Concept adapted from *Ships: The Relationships of Life* by Frank Hamrick, Bill Coffey, and Steve Braswell

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INTRODUCTION

About This Study

We wrote this study to help you and your students explore what godly, healthy, hope-filled relationships can look like. Relationships may differ, but as we abide in God's love and truth, we can reflect His grace no matter our situation.

This study covers the following:

- **Lordship** – We cling to God, who is our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer—the model of truth and love.
- **Kinship** – We honor our family, supporting each other as we build a safe, loving home.
- **Friendship** – We appreciate and uplift our friends, navigating conflict with humility and grace.
- **Fellowship** – We respect Christ's work through His church, supporting our assemblies and opposing threats to our doctrine and wellbeing.
- **Citizenship** – We recognize our rights and duties here on Earth, submitting them to the work of our true kingdom.
- **Marriage and Courtship** – We honor and cherish our spouse, pursuing intimacy in love. We seek a spouse only in love and truth.

Features of This Study

Teacher's Lectures

The lecture material in this Teacher's Manual can help you prepare and present the truths of this study to your students. We wrote the lectures verbatim, although they are formatted with headings and bullets in case you prefer to teach from limited notes.

Side Notes

These sections will define, summarize, illustrate, or contextualize key concepts in the lecture. You can omit many of these if you wish to shorten your lecture time.

Each lesson in the Student Manual contains a fill-in-the-blank outline of the corresponding teacher's lecture. Students can use this outline as a foundation for their lecture notes. Underlined words in this Teacher's Manual correspond to blanks in the students' outline.

You can find free digital presentations with these outlines on the *Love and Truth* product page at positiveaction.org.

Student Exercises, Reflections, and Readings

Included in the Student Manual, these activities encourage students to explore lecture topics in Scripture while also applying key principles to personal or hypothetical situations. Each lesson ends with a devotional reading that emphasizes God's care and protection.

If you wish to expand the length of this course, you could review the student exercises in a second or third session. Much of the content in the Student Manual could be discussed at length, especially if students have already put thought into their answers.

Completed Pages from the Student Manual

This Teacher's Manual includes a complete copy of the Student Manual material. At the end of each lesson, you can find facsimiles of the Student Manual pages with suggested answers filled in.

Quizzes

Teachers who wish to assess basic retention and comprehension can find a quiz for each lesson at the back of this Teacher's Manual. Each quiz includes five questions drawn primarily from the teacher's lecture, with one or two questions from the student exercises. You'll also find a space to write each lesson's memory verse.

Scripture Memory

An optional Scripture memory program is included below and on page 8 of the Student Manual.

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Memory Verse</i>	<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Memory Verse</i>
1	2 Corinthians 12:9	16	1 Corinthians 13:1-3
2	1 John 3:2	17	Matthew 18:15
3	John 17:3	18	Matthew 16:18
4	Ephesians 1:13-14	19	Matthew 28:19
5	1 John 4:19-20	20	Romans 16:17
6	John 17:15-17	21	Proverbs 3:35
7	Luke 11:13	22	1 Peter 4:10
8	Matthew 19:14	23	Titus 3:1-2
9	Psalms 78:4	24	1 Corinthians 11:11-12
10	Ephesians 6:1-3	25	Genesis 2:24
11	Proverbs 1:8-9	26	Ephesians 5:1-2
12	Ecclesiastes 4:9-10	27	Matthew 19:6
13	Psalms 1:1-2	28	1 Corinthians 7:4
14	John 15:12	29	1 Corinthians 6:12
15	Proverbs 18:12	30	1 Corinthians 9:23

Format and Age Level

The lectures and student exercises assume little familiarity with the passages discussed. In general, we designed this study for Christian young people who have a basic understanding of the gospel and a reading level appropriate for the eighth grade and above. Student Manual exercises in the early lessons are shorter and less difficult, giving students a chance to grow accustomed to the format before the more demanding lessons later in the study. Some students may still require help from a teacher, parent, or guardian to complete and understand this material, though we would encourage students to keep some of their answers and reflections private, as appropriate.

Given the sensitive nature of some of the topics—such as abuse and sexuality—we encourage teachers to consider previewing some lessons with parents ahead of class. Since the material focuses on biblical principles and philosophy, you should not need to separate your classes by age or sex. But depending on the background and maturity of your students, you may find that temporarily separated classes lead to better, more open discussion.

Teaching in Chapels or Assemblies

Though we prepared this study with church youth groups in mind, you can present much of this material in school assemblies or chapel meetings. For this setting, we'd suggest spending at least two sessions a week on one lesson:

- **First Session:** Present the lecture from the Teacher's Manual.
- **Second Session:** Finish the lecture, if necessary, and then discuss answers to the student exercises and reflections.

If students follow along by completing one lesson in the Student Manual each week, you should have plenty of material to discuss together. At this rate, thirty lessons should offer you thirty weeks of content—allowing the remainder of the school year for special assemblies and speakers.

Teaching with a God-Focus

At Positive Action, we believe that the Bible is God’s self-revelation, the Word He gave to reveal His glory, grace, and love. Therefore, we write our studies to magnify His majesty, His works, and His nature. In each passage of the Bible, we look for how God reveals Himself, then how His message can shine through context, culture, language, and application. We challenge students first to stand in awe of God, to know and love Him, for that is the first step of any true change of character.

**A God-focus is seeking
God’s glory and grace
through all things.**

With this perspective, all of life, Creation, and Scripture becomes a window through which we can see the light of God’s goodness, power, and love. As His grace draws our gaze to Himself, we learn to rejoice in Him. Only then, standing before His holiness, will we repent, submit, and worship. He becomes the center of all thought, desire, and action—the focus of our love and hope.

If We Lose Focus

If We Maintain Focus

Scripture becomes a how-to manual for life, a book of arbitrary do’s and don’ts.	We see Scripture as more than just a map or rulebook—it is the story of God’s glory.
We learn only Bible history, Bible stories, Bible facts. We see only heroes and villains, not the God that guided them for His glory.	As we teach of Moses, Ruth, and David, we magnify the God that uses imperfect men and women to reflect His glory.
We mimic holiness out of obligation. We do not ask God to give us grace to reflect His love.	Before we teach of holiness and love, we point to the perfection and sacrifice of Christ.
Sin becomes a personal failure, a trip and a fall outside the fold. We consider our obedience an example of our strength.	When we sin, we do not simply break God’s law—we betray Christ’s love. And when we, by His grace, reflect His holiness, we do not just obey Him—we abide in Him.

Feedback

As a non-profit publishing ministry, we consider you our co-laborer in the faith. Each curriculum remains a work in progress, and the people who teach these studies have a great impact on the scope and format of every new edition. If you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us—we'd love to hear from you.

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A Final Word

We pray that this study will help you and your students know God's glory, grow in that knowledge, and share it with others. To benefit the most from this study, we'd encourage you to do the following:

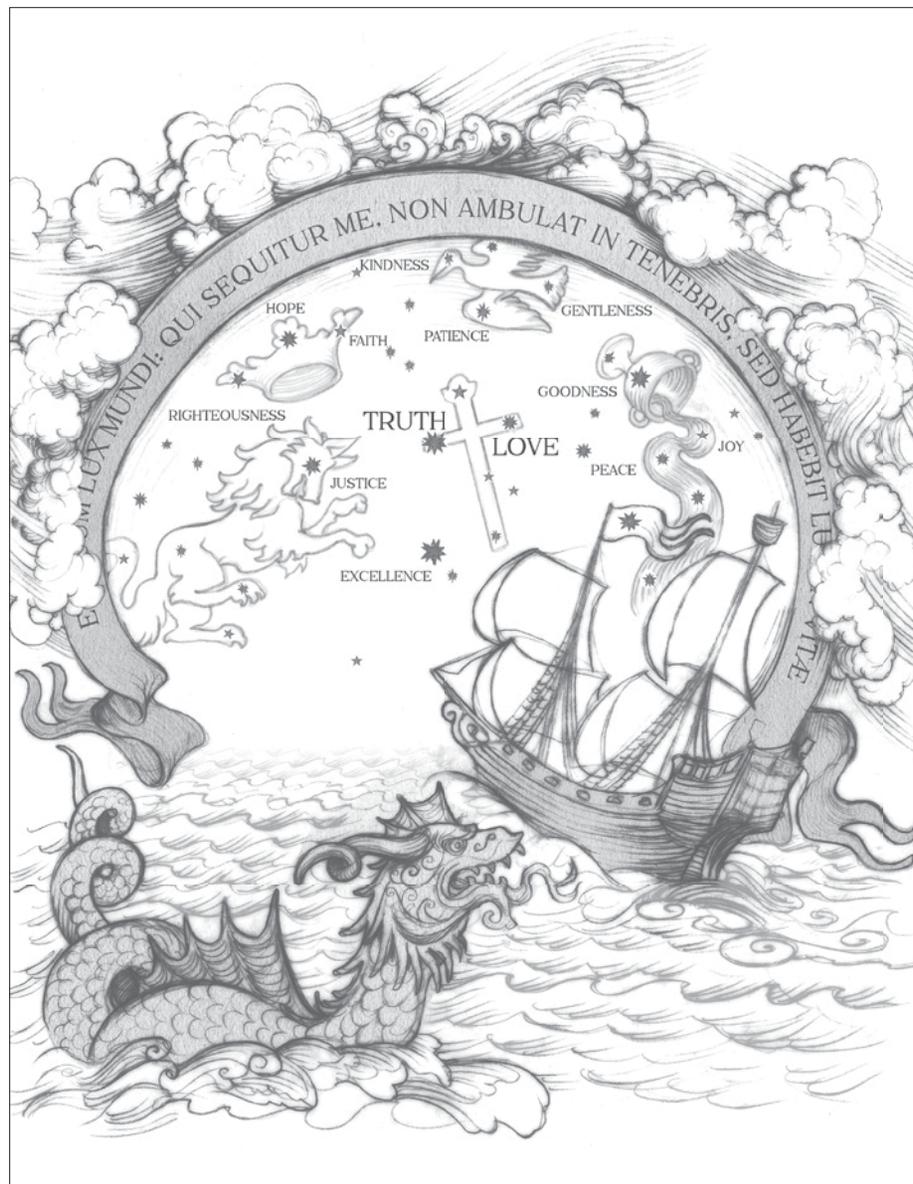
- Spend time each day in the Word. Use the material in this study to guide your devotional reading so that you can present God's truth and love from the heart. Spend time marking and adjusting the lecture content to suit your students' needs.
- Pray for your students, and ask God to grow you.
- Be vulnerable to your students, expressing questions and confidence in equal measure. Encourage them to explore Scripture with you.
- Be the love and truth that you want to see from your students.
- Depend on God's strength and grace, even in your weakness.

A Quick Note

We wrote this study to help you understand what godly, healthy, hope-filled relationships look like. We've framed up a few of the big ideas, but the finishing work is up to you. Ask God to show you His truth in His Word.

Whatever sea you sail from, we trust that God's love drives all your relationships closer to Himself. We're praying for you.

By His Grace,
Jim & Christa



IN THIS BOOK

As you work through this student manual, you'll develop a great reference you can revisit long after this study is complete. The more thought you put into your Bible study, the more you'll get out of it, both now and later.

Sections in Each Lesson

Teacher's Lesson Outline

This is a fill-in-the-blank outline of the lecture your teacher will present to your study group. These notes can help you follow along during class time and review each topic later.

Exercises

This section encourages you to dive into the Word on your own. In general, you'll read a passage of Scripture, and then explore questions about it. References and verse numbers will show you where to look for answers.

Reflections

Here the book will ask you to consider the principles you've learned from Scripture and apply them to new situations. Take a few moments to think about where you've been and where you're going.

Peace in the Storm

This section encourages you to read and meditate on a passage that highlights God's relationship with us. No matter how good or bad our human relationships may be, we can trust God to love and protect us.

A Note on Privacy

Throughout this study, you'll be asked to write your thoughts on some very personal topics. To encourage yourself to be honest and straightforward, please keep this workbook private, sharing your answers only as you'd like to participate in group discussions. If you can't make sure that your answers stay private, record some of them in another journal or document, or at least consider the questions carefully.

Getting the Most from Your Study

Class Time

- **Prepare before you get to class.** Bring this workbook and a pen or pencil.
- **Review the previous lesson.** A quick flip-through of last week's outline will refresh your memory.
- **Take notes.** Don't stop at filling in blanks. Write down your own thoughts and questions during the teacher's lesson. You'll find that writing will clarify your thoughts and simplify future review.
- **Join the discussions.** It's OK to talk. You'll learn more if you stay engaged in class.

Exercises

- **Pick the best time of your day to study the passages.** Try to find a time and place free of distraction. Play some quiet music or go to the library—whatever helps you focus.
- **Begin with prayer.** Ask God to teach you through the Scripture readings and show you how to grow in holiness.
- **Compare notes.** After you've studied and meditated, discuss what you've learned with other students, as appropriate.
- **Commit it to heart.** Your teacher may ask you to memorize a short passage from each lesson.

God prepared His truth for you to discover in His Word. By His grace, you can study the Bible. Seek His wisdom, and He'll show it to you.

STUDENT MANUAL PAGES

Scripture Memory

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Memory Verse</i>	<i>Signature</i>
1	2 Corinthians 12:9	
2	1 John 3:2	
3	John 17:3	
4	Ephesians 1:13-14	
5	1 John 4:19-20	
6	John 17:15-17	
7	Luke 11:13	
8	Matthew 19:14	
9	Psalms 78:4	
10	Ephesians 6:1-3	
11	Proverbs 1:8-9	
12	Ecclesiastes 4:9-10	
13	Psalms 1:1-2	
14	John 15:12	
15	Proverbs 18:12	
16	1 Corinthians 13:1-3	
17	Matthew 18:15	
18	Matthew 16:18	
19	Matthew 28:19	
20	Romans 16:17	
21	Proverbs 3:35	
22	1 Peter 4:10	
23	Titus 3:1-2	
24	1 Corinthians 11:11-12	
25	Genesis 2:24	
26	Ephesians 5:1-2	
27	Matthew 19:6	
28	1 Corinthians 7:4	
29	1 Corinthians 6:12	
30	1 Corinthians 9:23	

Notes

SHIPS OF THE BIBLE

Objectives

- Outline the scope of this study
- Review examples of biblical ships that God used to help His children
- Portray human relationships as vessels that encourage or discourage our relationship with God

Lesson

Ships and –Ships

We’re beginning a study about relationships—what they should look like, where they should go, how to tell if they’re sinking, how to patch them up, and even how to know when we should jump overboard. So the original authors of this study found an easy comparison between relationships and ships—that is, large boats that carry stuff over the water. If the stars guided ancient ships, what principles guide our relationships today? What’s our map, our GPS? What signs do we look for around us?

Now, is there some deep connection between the words *ship* and *relationship*? Do these words share an etymology—a common meaning or root word?

The answer is no. In English, the two just sound alike.

The Origin of “Ship”

The word *ship*—a large boat—comes from the Old English *scip*, which probably referred to chopping or cutting wood. Back in the sixth century, people in Europe made small boats by hollowing out the trunk of a tree. They took a large piece of natural material, trimmed it, shaped it, and smoothed it until they had a usable *ship*.

The Origin of the Other “Ship”

Now the suffix *-ship*—as in, relationship, fellowship, citizenship—probably descends from the Old English *-scipe*, which might be a distant cousin of our modern word *shape*. It carries the meaning of a skill or condition that has been shaped, developed, and refined over time.

Illustration—Types of -Ship

- Your *marksman*-ship is how well you've learned to hit a target.
- Your *member*-ship is your position within a group.
- Your *owner*-ship is a status that gives you rights over an object—like a book, a car, or a piece of land.

If there's a common meaning to bring ships and relationships together, it's that they do not happen by accident. They both require work to be good, and they both take us somewhere.

Definition—Relationship

So what do we mean by the word *relationship*? For the purposes of this study, a relationship is simply a connection between one person and another.

You have relationships with your family, your friends, your fellow students, other Christians, and so many others. Some of these relationships are close, tight, or personal, while others are distant or casual. In a way, you create a small relationship with someone just by saying hello on the street.

The Ships of the Bible

But what keeps relationships afloat? How do they sink? What are relationships good for, anyway? For these questions, some *ship* imagery will be helpful. So let's look at a few of the famous ships of the Bible.

The Ark

Maybe the biggest and most well-known is Noah's Ark. It measured roughly 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It had to be big because it needed to carry eight people and at least two members from each kind of the early animals.

We read in Genesis 6 that God saw the corruption that had spread through all the Earth's people, and He decided to destroy the world with a flood. But in His grace, He decided to save Noah and his family. So He told them to build a large ship, which would carry them and the animals through the storm to the new world on the other side.

Focus—God's Salvation

In the Ark we find a picture of God's salvation. The boat wasn't nearly as important as the God that used it. Noah wasn't saved by his own craftsmanship—he was saved through his relationship with God.

The Fishing Boats

But God doesn't need a huge ark to teach us about Himself. He can use small boats, too. In the first century AD, a fishing boat might have been only 15–30 feet long, and we see a few of these in the Gospels.

A Picture of Outreach (Matt. 4:18–22)

In Matthew 4, when Jesus first began His ministry, He called four fishermen—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—to be His disciples. They would follow Him, learn from Him, and then pass on His message to others. Jesus challenged these men to leave their boats and their nets because He intended to make them “fishers” of people. From this point onward, they were to help guide people to the Messiah.

A Teaching Platform (Luke 5:1–11)

Sometimes, Jesus taught while standing on a boat. In Luke 5, we read that Jesus got into Peter’s boat and asked him to put it out a little way from the shore. Then, sitting in a boat floating on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus spoke to the crowd.

The water helped amplify Christ’s voice, but it’s still amazing that the King of Kings would choose a humble fishing boat as a place of learning. Imagine if the Queen of England addressed her subjects from the back of a pickup truck, and you get an idea of how weird this was. But in moments like these, Christ wasn’t concerned with pomp and pageantry. He wanted to share the truth and love of God.

Over time, the crowds learned to associate the boat with Christ’s ministry—so much so that they looked for the boat when they thought Jesus might be in the area (Mark 5:21; John 6:22).

A Place to See Christ’s Power (Luke 8:22–25)

But to be clear, Jesus didn’t rely on the boat. For example—in Luke 8, He got into a boat with His disciples and suggested crossing the Sea of Galilee. After they set out, Jesus fell asleep. But then a storm blew across the lake, the boat took on water, and the disciples thought they might die. So they woke Jesus up, and He, instead of helping with the sails or the oars, simply rebuked the wind and the waves. He told nature to calm down—and amazingly, immediately, it did.

The disciples were awestruck, but Jesus asked them, “Where is your faith?”

Discussion: What do you think Christ meant by that question?

What did the disciples need to trust in? Should they have faith in a boat, in a calm sea—or in the God who rules the wind and the water? After this, the disciples began to wonder who Jesus really was. What kind of person could make nature obey Him?

A Refuge to Leave Behind (Matt. 14:22–33)

But as if to make His point clear—Christ let the disciples get caught in *yet another* storm. This time, He was nowhere to be seen—that is, until the disciples saw Him walking on the water toward them.

They were scared, at first—they thought He was a spirit. But Jesus called out and told them not to be afraid. Peter replied, “Lord, if it’s really You, ask me to walk out to You on the water.”

Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and stepped onto the water. That must have taken a lot of trust. Peter put aside everything he knew about ships and storms and water and the physics of human buoyancy—and put his safety in the hands of his Teacher.

Of course, Peter let his eyes drift from Jesus; he saw the waves; he began to doubt—but Christ lifted him back up and took him to the boat. There the disciples did the only thing that made sense at that moment. They worshiped their Teacher as a person who must have been sent by God.

Focus—God’s Care

Peter’s ship was a good symbol of God’s care. But Peter learned to trust Jesus even more than that boat. He learned to value the Giver more than any gift.

The Ship to Tarshish

Of course, not every ship in the Bible gives us a positive lesson.

You’ve probably heard the story of Jonah, the Old Testament prophet that God told to go to the city of Nineveh and preach repentance. Jonah had a choice.

- On the one hand, he could go to his people’s enemies and tell them that God would destroy them if they did not repent. The Old Testament is full of stories about prophets that were killed because people didn’t like what they said. Jonah knew that Nineveh could add one more prophet to that list. Why should he risk his life for the sake of his enemies?
- Or Jonah could take the other option—he could board a ship to Tarshish, a city on the other side of the Mediterranean, in what is today Spain. Maybe his all-knowing, all-seeing God wouldn’t find him there.

So Jonah chose to run. He left Israel on a ship full of sailors who didn’t know or care about this Jehovah.

But they learned to care quickly. God brought up a huge storm—forcing Jonah to admit his sin and tell the sailors to throw him overboard. The ship carried on without Jonah—the sailors a little wiser for the experience—and Jonah was swallowed by a large fish, likely a whale.

Focus—God’s Truth

Jonah *mostly* learned his lesson, and God still used him to reveal light and truth to the people of Nineveh. And just as importantly, we can learn from this sliver of the story that sometimes when a ship is carrying us away from where God wants us to be, the best thing to do is jump off and trust God to send us a whale.

Some ships—some relationships—should be left behind, even if we don’t think we can swim. Follow God, even if you can’t find another relationship to carry you.

The Prison Ship

Because God cares for us even when—and *especially* when—our ships sink. Here's one example—when the Apostle Paul was sailing to Rome as a prisoner, the ship's captain took a risky shortcut and got lost in powerful storm.

God told Paul that the ship would sink, but everyone onboard—every soldier, sailor, prisoner, and passenger—would make it to shore alive (Acts 27).

Focus—God's Power

God kept His promise, and He gave Paul an amazing opportunity to share the gospel. Everyone on that ship saw God's power and provision. And Paul, the lowly prisoner, counseled them through the storm, the shipwreck, and their stay on the island of Malta. God used Paul to heal the sick father of the ruler of the island, and a fledgling church was born.

The lesson? God doesn't work *despite* shipwrecks—He can work *through* shipwrecks.

Conclusion

So what will we learn through this study?

- **God can use both good ships and bad ships for our good.** They can protect us and build us up in ways we don't always expect. Yes, we must put a lot of love and work into our relationships, but they can help us grow and mature, as well.
- **However, some people use ships to pull us away from God.** To be clear—nothing can separate us from God's love, but some people can harm us and discourage our walk with Him. We must value our relationship with God more than any other. When a ship tries to steer us away from Him, we must either . . .
 - Turn the ship around
 - Or jump off the ship and trust God to take care of us
- **Finally, when our ships sink, we can still trust God.**
 - He alone commands the wind and the waves.
 - He alone can protect us from danger.
 - And He alone can give us the courage and grace to follow Him—even if we have to walk alone on the water.

Read Philippians 1:6. As Christians—that is, as people who have accepted Christ as Savior, who have begun a relationship with God—we can trust that God will continue working *in* us and *through* us until the day we see Him face to face.

L E S S O N 1

SHIPS OF THE BIBLE

Lesson Notes

- A *relationship* is a connection between one person and another.

The Ships

How God Teaches Us

The Ark <i>Genesis 5-9</i>	A picture of God's salvation
The Fishing Boats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Picture of Outreach (Matt. 4:18-22) • A Teaching Platform (Luke 5:1-11) • A Place to See Christ's Power (Luke 8:22-25) • A Refuge to Leave Behind (Matt. 14:22-33)
The Ship to Tarshish <i>Jonah 1</i>	When a ship carries us away from God, sometimes we should jump ship and trust Him.
The Prison Ship <i>Acts 27</i>	God works through shipwrecks.

Big Ideas:

- God uses all ships—both good and bad—for our good (Rom. 8:28).
- Some people use ships to pull us away from God.
- When our ships sink, we can still trust God (Phil. 1:6-21).

Exercises

Read Matthew 14.

In this chapter, we catch an astounding glimpse of the love of Jesus. Our Messiah, God in the flesh, the omnipotent Lord of Creation, chose to live among us. He came to Earth to restore a relationship—to give us a way to know God the Father. Christ reached out, even when doing so was painful.

A Man of Sorrows

Note also John 11:33–36. When Jesus’ friend Lazarus died and He saw the sorrow of Martha and Mary, He was moved and troubled. He wept openly.

As part of His ministry to us, Christ submitted Himself to the sufferings we all face. Isaiah described Him as a man of sorrows, a person who knew grief well (Isa. 53:3). Though Jesus could perform miracles, command angels, and do *anything* He wanted to do, He chose to feel what we feel.

Jesus endured weakness and temptation in part to show that He would be a sympathetic priest for us (Heb. 4:14–16). As both God and human, Jesus is the perfect mediator between us and the Father.

- Because of the twisted politics of a corrupt royal family, who was executed (vv. 8–10)?
John the Baptist

- This was Jesus’ cousin, the person that God had used to herald the coming of the Messiah. How did Jesus respond to the news of John’s death (v. 13)?
He withdrew to find solitude.

- The crowds following Christ, however, did not leave Him alone. They met Him on the opposite shore, many of them sick and hungry. How did Jesus respond, even in His weariness (vv. 14–21)?
He healed those who were sick, and He gave 5,000+ people food to eat.

After these miracles, Jesus finally found time to rest and talk with His Father (v. 23). His disciples, however, got caught up in a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus walked out to them on the water, and though He startled them at first, He told them not to be afraid.

- How did Peter show trust in Jesus (vv. 28–31)?

He asked to come out of the boat and walk to Jesus. Even when he doubted and began to sink, he asked Jesus to save him.

Even though Peter’s faith mixed with his doubt, he trusted Jesus to save him from the waves.

Jesus suffered pain, shame, and death so that we could have the joy of a relationship with God. As we meditate on His kind of love, as we look for God’s goodness around us, He will teach us to trust Him. And over time, we will learn to love others like He loves us. By God’s grace, we can love others even when we least feel like it.

- Write 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Text will vary by translation.

If we meditate on this verse, we won’t be too harsh on Peter. We’re all like him. It’s in our nature to fear and to doubt—and in a way, that’s healthy. Caution keeps us from stumbling into danger. But if we want a good relationship with God—and with other people—we must also learn to *trust*.

We might take little steps at first, careful of the waves, and we might even start to sink. But we must keep our eyes on Christ, confident that as we walk toward Him, He will keep us in His hands (John 10:29).

Read Hebrews 12:1–2, and finish the following sentences.

- As believers, we should lay aside every weight and sin that hinders us.
- We should run this race with patience, endurance.
- And we should look to Jesus, who gave us faith—and will perfect it in us.

We can't force ourselves to have more faith. We depend on God to give us that—because only God can prove Himself. We can only seek Him, follow Him, and watch Him fulfill our trust.

Reflections

- Of the things you know that God wants you to do, what do you find most difficult?

List three relationships in your life that you believe you could better steer toward God. By the end of this study, how would you like to see these relationships improve?

<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Ways This Should Improve</i>
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Peace in the Storm

Meditating on Your Most Important Relationship

Read Hebrews 11.

- What things cannot be proven—that is, what beliefs can we accept *only* by faith (vv. 1–3, 6)?
- What did God do through the faithful people listed in this chapter?
- What do we have that these Old Testament believers did not (vv. 39–40)? What truth has God given us to make our faith stronger?

Unit 1

Lordship

GOD OUR CREATOR

Objectives

- Showcase the majesty of God, as revealed in His power, holiness, and love
- Picture God as our Creator, the model of parental love
- Introduce the concept of God’s image

Lesson

God is our heavenly Father. It’s easy to forget what a privilege it is to call Him that. Beyond all reason, our holy, exalted God chose to build a relationship with poor, imperfect, hateful, sinful people like us.

The Other Gods

Study other religions—especially ancient religions—and you’ll realize why the God who spoke with Abraham is so unique. If you lived in the Old Testament era, the God of Israel might seem strange to you. Jehovah—Yahweh, the “I AM,” the One Who Always Exists— isn’t like the Iron Age gods who demanded only war, blood, and corruption.

Illustration—Ra

Ancient Egyptians worshiped many gods, but by far their favorite was Ra, the sun god. They worshiped him as the first life, a being born from some primeval substance before anything else existed. He created the first set of gods that would in turn create water, earth, and sky. During the day, he sailed his sun-ship across the sky, then traveled through the underworld at night and returned to his original position before morning.

Egypt’s rulers, the Pharaohs, eventually claimed to be Ra’s children. Their power was just as sure as the sun rising each morning.

Illustration—Baal

In ancient Hebrew, the word *baal* simply means “lord” or “ruler.” So when we read of people worshiping *Baal* in the Old Testament, they were probably worshiping their own local version of a popular god.

The most common version of Baal was the god of storms, wind, sky, and clouds—in a farmer’s mind, the god most vital to life and fertility. When Baal was pleased, he offered soft rain and dew. When angry, he let loose the worst kinds of weather. Since

Baal didn't provide many scriptures or covenants, people didn't know how to keep him happy.

As a god of fertility, Baal was as corrupt as he was fickle. People portrayed him as the husband or lover of a number of popular feminine deities—including his sister and at least one divine cow. Worship of Baal could involve ritualistic prostitution, mutilation, and even human sacrifice.

Baal and Ra were just two of the more popular deities in a pantheon of gods worshiped by ancient cultures. But these gods, like all other made-up idols and ideologies, simply reflected human nature. They were corrupt, fickle, irrational beings who offered nothing but debauchery, despair, and death.

- But what if there was a God that didn't cater to our base desires?
- What if there was a God who didn't exist just to support a ruling class, who didn't serve the whims of a small elite? What if there was a God that kings and queens could not control?
- What if there was a God that challenged us to look above ourselves?
- What if there was a God who offered us more than chaos, who told us clearly what He expected, who made us promises—and then kept them?

The God, Jehovah

When God first spoke to Moses in Exodus 3, He introduced Himself as Yahweh, or as we've come to say in English, *Jehovah*—the “I AM,” the One who is eternal, who holds the past, present, and future of the universe in His hands. This was the eternal, all-powerful Being who promised that He would always *be with* His people (Gen. 17:1–8). Unlike other gods, Jehovah would relate to humanity through covenants, so that people would always know where they stood with Him.

Focus—The Gift of God's Image

How could such a relationship be possible? Because God created humanity in His own image. According to Genesis 1:27, God made the first man and the first woman in a way that somehow, indescribably, reflected His own Person. Perhaps the first gift that God gave man and woman was the capacity to have a one-to-one, I-to-You relationship with their Creator. We were designed from the ground up to need God, love God, and reflect God.

But what is God like? How can we begin to describe Him? Here are three big ways.

God Is Powerful

God calls Himself almighty (Gen. 17:1), the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16). He sees everything (Ps. 139; Prov. 15:3), knows everything (Ps. 33:13–15; Heb. 4:12–13), and can accomplish anything He chooses. We can use pictures or metaphors to describe

God's power, but every example falls short of His majesty. The entirety of Scripture gives us only the faintest glimpse of His glory (cf. John 21:25; 1 Cor. 13:12).

Illustration—The Act of Creation

We first read of God's power at the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1, where we see God create Earth and everything else in the universe—all its laws, order, meaning, and even time itself. First, He filled this Creation with *objects*—things that could eat, move, walk, or even think—but these things didn't bear God's image.

Then God created a man, Adam—a being that reflected God's image. Adam looked around for a companion among the animals, but couldn't find one. He was a *subject* in a world of *objects*. He understood the meaning of *you* and *me*, concepts like freedom, joy, identity, knowledge, foresight—but nothing else on Earth did.

So God, using Adam's own flesh, created another person—somewhat different, somewhat the same. She was the first woman, Eve, and she, just like Adam, bore God's image.

Now, not only could these two people talk and walk with God, but they could also appreciate each other as eternal persons.

- Animals could relate to each other only as objects in the here and now.
- Humans, however, could relate to each other as subjects—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

God called His Creation good. And even though the first man and woman sinned, turned away from God, and set loose death, the world still reflected God's majesty in a corrupted way.

Illustration—God's Sovereignty over Creation

And God maintained His control. His rule, His sovereignty did not waver over what He made—even when people made up other gods to replace Him.

When the Egyptians refused to free the people of Israel, God released ten plagues on the country—including three days of total darkness (Exo. 10:21–22). Where was their sun god Ra then?

And where was Baal when Elijah challenged the false prophets to invoke the god of storms on top of Mt. Carmel? Baal didn't hear the prophets begging, nor did he see them cut themselves in despair—because he wasn't there.

Jehovah, on the other hand, harnessed the power of the sky and sent down fire to vaporize an altar and prove Himself once again to His people (1 Kings 18).

If God's power is vast, what about His character? What is He like?

God Is Holy

When we say that God is holy, we mean that He is both perfect and exalted.

Our Perfect God

God's power is an extension of His will, which turns the world toward goodness and light. He is Himself goodness, light, truth, and justice. In Him exists no darkness or sin or wrong (1 John 1:5).

We could say that God is good, righteous, and perfect. Those adjectives *describe* Him well, but they don't give us a complete picture of Him. They do not *define* Him. Quite the opposite—it is God who defines what is good, righteous, and perfect. These ideas are rooted in His character. If we want to understand goodness, righteousness, and perfection, we must look to God.

Context—What Is Good and What Is Bad?

Something is only good to the extent that it reflects God.

- For example, *truth* is good because it accurately reflects God and the world He created.
- *Lies* are bad because God does not lie. Lies reject and twist God's truth.

And at a higher level, we could define *sin* as the rejection of God and His goodness.

- We sin when we turn away from God.
- We sin when we step away from what God says is good and right (1 John 3:4).
- We sin when we worship someone or something other than God.
- We sin when we spread a lie that contradicts God's truth.
- We sin when we harm other people—God's image bearers—for selfish reasons.

Focus—God's Unchanging Character

God does not sin because He will never *not be God*. He is *immutable*—that is, unchangeable, always the same (Mal. 3:6). He may seem different from one part of the Bible to the next, and He may show His grace differently to each person, but He will always be the same God.

Our Exalted God

In Isaiah 6, the prophet had a vision of God on His throne in heaven. All around God, countless angels repeated, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts. The entire Earth is filled with His glory." This vision of perfection struck Isaiah so deeply that he despaired over his sin.

Isaiah saw that God was *exalted*—lifted high above everything and everyone else. Nothing could compare to God—not Satan when he rebelled, not the Tower of Babel when humanity tried to build a ladder to heaven, not *anything*.

God is above, and God is eternal. He has no beginning, middle, or end. He always simply *is*. Time means nothing to Him (Ps. 90:4)—He transcends time, space, and all our understanding. To Him, everything that *was, is, and will be* lies entirely in His control.

Focus—God’s Transcendence and Love

This is why God, especially in the Old Testament, shrouded Himself in darkness, in pillars of fire, in clouds. God told His people that the fullness of His majesty would be too much for any person to see (Exo. 33:20).

How could anyone truly know this God—whose might, understanding, and presence transcended the universe? But a relationship is exactly what God offers His children.

God Is Good

Why does God interact with us? Because He is good. From Him comes every good thing (James 1:17). He *is* love, and He shares all His goodness with the people that He calls sons and daughters (1 John 3:1–3).

Illustration—To the First Man and Woman

Before humanity’s sin, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve, showing truth and love to them personally. Even after the fall, God gave them hope in the form of a promise—the promise of a Savior who would come to Earth and create a bridge across the void of sin and death, all the way back to God.

Illustration—To Israel

Many years later, God created a special relationship between Himself and the family of Abraham and Sarah. Their descendants, the people of Israel, would be God’s chosen people, and they would be examples of God’s truth and love. Not all of them would trust God—some would even reject Him—but through them God would reveal Himself to the rest of the world.

So, long after Abraham, after God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt, He led them to the land He promised their ancestors. On the way, the people built a tabernacle—a large tent that would serve as a temple wherever they made camp. There, in that place, in that time, an eternal, all-powerful God rested His presence. The tabernacle—and later, a permanent temple—became the intersection of the finite and the infinite. Though God could be anywhere and do anything, He chose to focus His love on a group of ex-slaves and nomads—people that the rest of the world didn’t care for.

God’s love for His people takes many forms—sometimes soft, simple instruction and sometimes firm, strict correction. The Bible includes many images that help us picture the kind of love that God offers to those who trust Him.

Picture—A Shepherd (Ps. 23)

In Psalm 23, David compares God to a shepherd, one that leads his sheep through green pastures and even dark valleys. In God we find care and security that no one else could give us.

Picture—A Rock (2 Sam. 22:3)

God is our rock—our refuge, our shield, our salvation, our stronghold. He bends His power to protect us, and even though He may allow physical harm to befall His children, no one can touch our eternal soul. Our fate and destiny lie safe with Him, and no one can pluck us out of His hands (John 10:27–30).

Picture—A Bear, a Lion, and a Hen (Hosea 13:4–8; Matt. 23:37)

In Hosea 13, God compares Himself to a mother bear and a lion, saying that those who threaten His children will invite His wrath and destruction. Elsewhere, God describes His love as the kind of comfort and nourishment a mother provides her young children (Is. 49:15; 66:13), and Jesus compares His care for Israel to a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings (Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34).

Jesus taught us that God has the same natural affection for His children that an earthly father should have for his own. God will not deny us the spiritual food and support we need (Luke 11:11–13), nor will He give us anything that would damage our eternal relationship with Him (James 1:13). We can approach God with the trust and affection of a little child (Rom. 8:14–15) who leaps into her daddy’s arms.

Picture—Our Rescuer (2 Tim. 4:18)

God is the God that rescues people despite their sin. In countless stories, God shows His willingness to redeem everyone who comes to Him.

- God took Moses, a murderer with a speech problem, and made him into His chosen spokesperson.
- God redeemed Rahab, a prostitute living in the pagan city of Jericho, as well as Ruth, a homeless Moabite woman who was caring for the mother of her dead husband. Both of these amazing women were ancestors of the Messiah. Jesus was unashamed to be their descendant.
- David, Ruth’s great-grandson, was a mere shepherd boy when God protected Him against a lion, a bear, and a gigantic Philistine warrior. And despite David’s many faults and failures, God made him king of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus.

Conclusion

The Bible is full of unlikely people showcasing God's love—because *all* of us are unlikely. We all sin (Rom. 3:23), and we all deserve death (Rom. 5:12–14; 6:23). But God offers us redemption.

That redemption came in the form of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, who showed us God's power, God's holiness, and God's love in a way that no symbol, no picture, no parchment ever could. Jesus was and is the ultimate *revelation*—the ultimate revealed truth—of our Creator God.

Why must we study God when we study our own relationships? Because His goodness should be the model, the template for all our relationships. As our Creator, God is the perfect example of a parent. Unlike earthly fathers and mothers, He will never fail us. And as we rest in that kind of love, His grace overflows from our lives into the lives of others.

In the next lesson, we'll continue to study God—specifically, the life of Jesus and the relationship He offers us.

GOD OUR CREATOR

Lesson Notes

Describing Jehovah

- **God Is Powerful** _____
 - He calls Himself Almighty (Gen. 17:1).
 - He sees everything (Ps. 139; Prov. 15:3).
 - He knows everything (Ps. 33:13–15; Heb. 4:12–13).
 - He created the universe and gave humanity His image (Gen. 1).

- **God Is Holy** _____
 - Our **Perfect** _____ God (1 John 1:5)

Sin is the rejection of God and His goodness. _____

- Our **Exalted** _____ God (Isa. 6)
- **God Is Good** _____

Pictures of God's Care

A Shepherd	Psalm 23
A Rock	2 Samuel 22:3
A Bear, a Lion, and a Hen	Hosea 13:4–8; Matthew 23:37
Our Rescuer	2 Timothy 4:18

Exercises

Important to your relationships is your concept of *self*. You can't relate to people well unless you first have an idea of who and what you are.

Different people construct their self-concept in different ways:

- Some people depend on their family.
- Others point out what makes them different or unique.
- And some define themselves by what they do.

These ideas are all part of us, but as believers who trust Christ, we can find a new and even better self through God.

God's Image in You

When God created humanity, He made us in His image (Gen. 1:26–27). Though we don't yet understand all of what that idea means, Scripture explains that we have a spiritual dimension to our being—something that points to a higher reality.

Just like a painting is more than simply brushstrokes on a canvas, we are more than atoms and cells and organs. Our thoughts can, in some small way, reflect the thoughts of God Himself. And because we bear His image, we can fellowship with Him.

Of course, we have tarnished this image with our sin. With our hatred, our lies, and our selfishness, humanity has twisted God's reflection into something grotesque.

- Read Genesis 9:1–7. Here God gives Noah and his family some instructions as they rebuild human society after the Flood. God tells Noah that for the sin of murder, the punishment should be death. What is the reason for this punishment—that is, what makes murder so bad (v. 6)?

God made humanity in His own image.



STUDENT MANUAL PAGES

- And you don't need to be a murderer to profane God's image. Read James 3:8–10. How can we be hypocritical with our words (v. 9)?

We can praise God, yet still curse people made in His likeness.

Through the sacrifice of Christ, God has cleansed believers of their sin. Jesus is the perfect image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), so by His grace, we can once again shine brightly with His love and truth. We can bear His image proudly, and we can respect the good He has placed in others, as well.

Who You Are: Two Perspectives

Describe yourself in the following tables, using the fewest, most important words possible.

Earthly Perspective: How I See Myself as a Person

<p>My Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where I came from • What I've done • Who I used to be 	
<p>My Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where I am now • What I do now • Who I am now 	
<p>My Destiny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where I'm going • What I hope to do • What I hope to be 	

Spiritual Perspective: How God Sees Me as a Believer

<p>My Heritage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genesis 1:27 • Romans 3:9–18 	<p>I am made in God's image, but I am also a sinner in need of His grace.</p>
<p>My Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romans 5:6–10 • Romans 8:14–17 	<p>When I trusted in Jesus, God made me one of His children—a joint-heir with Christ.</p>
<p>My Destiny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 John 3:2–3 • 1 Corinthians 13:11–12 	<p>One day, I will be more like God, and I will finally know Him face-to-face.</p>

- Read Romans 8:15. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, what can we now call God? Abba, Father

If we trust Christ, we can embrace our roles as sons and daughters of God. He gives us an identity more secure—and a hope more certain—than any we'd find on Earth. People will fail us, and we will fail ourselves, but God will never let us fall out of His hands (John 10:28–29).

Reflections

God has placed His image in us, and He expects us to reflect His love and truth to others. Think of four people in the following categories and write a specific way you intend to reflect God to each person.

<i>Person</i>	<i>One Way I Can Reflect God</i>
A family member	
A friend	
Someone in my peer group at church	
Someone who opposes or frustrates me in some way	

Peace in the Storm

Meditating on Your Most Important Relationship

Read 1 John 3.

- For believers, what part of our destiny is certain (vv. 2, 23–24)?
- If we choose to abide in Christ, what will we put away (vv. 4–6)?
- If we choose to follow Christ’s example, what will we do instead (vv. 11, 16)?

GOD OUR SAVIOR

Objectives

- Explore Christ's role as the Messiah
- Identify key characteristics of Christ's ministry
- Present the gospel as the perfect expression of God's power, holiness, and goodness

Lesson

Review

Let's review what we covered in the previous lesson.

God Is Powerful

First, we discussed God's power, especially the power He revealed by creating the universe. He sees everything, knows everything, and can do anything He chooses to do. He holds complete sovereignty over all things—even the forces we don't yet understand.

God Is Holy

Also, God is holy—He's perfect, sinless, and exalted over everything. He exists above all—His frame of reference is higher and more comprehensive than we can imagine. He created the very idea of time and space, and the universe rests in His hands. Furthermore, He expects perfect righteousness from anyone who wants to have a relationship with Him.

God Is Good

Finally, God is good and loving. He does not just throw His power around in anger. He's chosen to reach down and commune with us. In the Old Testament, He revealed Himself through the people of Israel. And in the New Testament, He finally sent through Israel a Messiah, Jesus, who offers God's goodness to the rest of the world.

Focus—God's Messiah

Again—why was the Messiah sent? When the first man and woman sinned, death and corruption entered the world, and humanity was cursed. We call this the *Fall*, and it created a gap between us and God. It tore apart our relationship with Him.

But God promised that He would send a Messiah to bridge that gap, to save anyone who placed their faith in Him. Jesus is that Messiah—the perfect expression of God’s power, holiness, and goodness.

The Messiah

Background

Discussion: So who is a messiah? What does the word *messiah* even mean?

Messiah is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, which means “anointed one.” The Greek word *Christ* means the same thing. In some ancient cultures, people would pour oil or fragrance over the head of a person chosen to fulfill a special purpose. This was a way to mark someone with the approval of the community or of God Himself.

Illustration—Anointing David as King

We see an example of this kind of ceremony when the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king of Israel. Samuel poured oil on the boy’s head to symbolize God’s choice and blessing (1 Sam. 16:1–13).

David served as a kind of messiah to his people, saving them from the Philistines and encouraging their worship of God. But David was human and sinful. He could not save Israel from their sin.

Jesus was *the* Messiah—the Savior that God promised to send at the Fall. When we call the Savior “Jesus Christ,” we fit His given name together with His title.

His Purpose

Discussion: So why did the Messiah come to Earth? What was His purpose?

Jesus gave many answers to that question:

- He came to Earth to fulfill the Old Testament Law (Matt. 5:17).
- He gave us an example of sacrificial love by caring for others and by giving up His life for us (Matt. 20:28).
- He reached out to sinners in a way no one else could (Mark 2:17).
- He offered salvation with eternal life (John 3:16–17).
- He offered abundant life, as well (John 10:10).
- He gave us light and truth through the knowledge of God the Father (John 12:44–50).
- He established believers as heirs of God—as His own children, who could claim their Father’s blessing (Gal. 4:4–5).

But all these reasons boil down to one big idea—Jesus came to Earth to connect us back to God. He redeemed God’s children.

Focus—God’s Outreach

Anyone who places their faith in Christ can now have a relationship with God—the kind of relationship that sin prevented us from having before. Jesus bridged the gap between God and humanity.

His Identity

How could Jesus do this? Because He was God Himself, come in human form. He was somehow fully God and fully human, a perfect image of the Father to us (Phil. 2:5–7).

Definition—The Son of God

When we call Jesus “the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33), we’re translating a Greek phrase that means Jesus is of the same “essence” as God. He is not God’s Son in a literal, biological sense—rather, He is the only begotten of God because He *is* God. He is the same kind of unique being that *only God can be*.

Along with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was *with* God—and *was* God—when the universe began, and for the eternity before that (Gen 1:27; John 1:1–3, 18).

If that sounds confusing, it’s because it is confusing. We can’t begin to *define* God—we can only describe Him a little. Thankfully, we can find images and pictures in the Bible that help us understand a little of how God interacts with us.

Focus—God’s Unity

We call God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit the *Trinity*. These three Persons interact together as a unified Godhead—which pictures the kind of unity that God wants us to have.

When Jesus prayed to God the Father in John 17, Jesus said that He had come to Earth so that we—that is, those who trust in Him—could all be “one” in Christ, just like Jesus was “one” with God (vv. 20–26). Our relationship with other believers should be good, loving, and unified in purpose. As Jesus told His disciples in John 13:35, people should be able to tell that we follow Christ by the way we love our fellow Christians.

His Ministry

When Jesus was on Earth, He did a lot of things for a lot of people:

- He taught people about God.
- He healed people who were sick.
- He fed people who were hungry.
- He debated things like compassion and morality with the religious leaders of the day.
- He trained *disciples*, or student-followers, to carry on His work after He was gone.

We could talk a lot about what Jesus said and did while on Earth. Though His ministry lasted only three years, the Apostle John speculated that the entire Earth couldn't contain a complete record of everything Jesus did and taught (John 21:27).

We could—and should—spend a lifetime studying Jesus' ministry, but in this study we'll focus on two facets of His work: truth and love. Of course, perfect love includes truth, and perfect truth will always involve love. You can't have one without the other—because both should reflect God.

Focus—God's Truth and Love

We'll define and discuss these more later. But know for now that Christ gave us an amazing example of both truth and love.

- Sometimes the truth He taught was difficult to understand.
- Sometimes the truth was comforting.
- But everything He said and did was for the good of those who followed Him—and for the good of those who would trust Him many years later, like us (John 17:20–21).

His Sacrifice

Jesus' teaching, preaching, and miracles are important—from those we learn a lot about God. But perhaps the clearest expression of God's character is the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross.

Context—Sacrifices in the Old Testament

After humanity fell into sin, God commanded that people sacrifice animals to picture their repentance for sin. Sacrifices also showed their faith that a Savior would one day be the last sacrifice for all.

Jesus came to Earth to be that sacrifice. We could never pay the penalty for our sin, so He took on that curse for us—He became our sin and endured our punishment (2 Cor. 5:21).

After three years of Jesus' ministry, the religious leaders finally had Him arrested because He claimed that He was God. He stood silently while they accused Him. The crowds called for His death, and Pilate, a Roman governor who wanted to keep the people happy, ordered that Jesus be executed by crucifixion.

Roman soldiers then stripped Jesus of His clothes and lashed Him with a whip. They forced Him to carry a cross of wood toward the site of His execution—at least, until a man named Simon stepped in to carry the cross for Him (Matt. 27:32). On a hill called Golgotha, just outside of Jerusalem, the soldiers nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross, and they raised the beam high up over the ground. There hung the Messiah, naked, bleeding, and suffocating, between two common thieves. It took hours for them to die.

But that wasn't even the worst of it. When Jesus *became* our sin, God the Father turned away from Him (Matt. 27:46), ripping a cosmic void between two members of the Godhead. This shows us how far He was willing to go to restore our relationship with Him. On the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God—why have You forsaken Me?" We cannot begin to fathom that level of anguish. Every bit of judgment that humanity deserved—God laid it all on Himself.

And it killed Him. Jesus died there, and His followers buried Him in a tomb. But three days later, to prove once and for all that sin and death had no power over Him, He rose again (Luke 24:5–7). His followers were amazed, and He spent forty days convincing them that He was truly, literally, physically alive again. Then He ascended back to heaven (Luke 24:50–53).

But before He left, He commanded His followers to go and share the good news of Himself with others (Matt. 28:16–20). The word *gospel* simply means "good news," and it's this:

- We are lost and powerless in our sin. We deserve death, judgment, and separation from God (Rom. 3:23).
- But Jesus died to pay for our sin, and He rose to show His power over death (1 Cor. 15:3–4, 56–57).
- If we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior—if we accept His sacrifice for our sin—God will forgive our sin and consider us as righteous as Christ (Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22).
- We don't need to fear the penalty for our sin (Rom. 6:23).
- Instead, we believers can now live in a way that is holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1).

We can now reflect God's holiness, grace, and love—because we can now fellowship with Him. We know Him—however imperfectly—and one day in heaven we'll know Him even better.

The God of the Gospel

In the last lesson, we noted that God is holy, powerful, and loving. It can be hard to imagine a God that is all three of those things. Two seem possible, but three almost seem contradictory. For example, how can evil exist if God is holy, loving, and all-powerful? But in Christ's sacrifice, we find all three of these characteristics acting in harmony.

Holiness at the Cross

God's holiness could never mingle with the sin and corruption of humanity. For reasons we can't yet understand, God decided that only a perfect, holy sacrifice could pay the penalty for our sin.

Christ was perfect—He kept the Law entirely, never once sinned, and He was always in complete communion with God. Though He faced the same weaknesses and pain that

we do, He nonetheless remained holy. He satisfied His own requirement for perfect, righteous justice.

Power at the Cross

He did this through His own power. Only God could wield power over death and sin. Only Christ could become sin, take on sin's curse, die, and rise again. And only He could make that act count as holiness for the people who trust in Him.

Love at the Cross

But Christ didn't exercise that power for His own sake. He didn't use His power to lessen the pain He suffered for us. God took all the punishment for all the evil every person has ever committed—and bore it Himself. He tore Himself apart for us—suffering the lashes and the torture, yes—but more painfully, He divided the Father from the Son for the first time in all eternity.

He endured this separation in order to bridge the divide between Himself and us. Only someone with the purest love could choose this kind of suffering to reach out to people who hated and rejected Him.

Conclusion

God is the perfect example of a loving parent and savior. He models the best form of love to anyone willing to look.

If you do not yet know this love—if you have not yet accepted Christ's gift of salvation, but would like to—please do not hesitate to ask. Talk to someone who can share with you how they came to faith in Christ—and how you can, too.

And remember—God did not save us just to leave us alone. His love endures with us day after day after day. So in the next lesson, we'll look at how God relates to us today as a sustainer, helper, and friend.

L E S S O N 3

GOD OUR SAVIOR

Lesson Notes

The Messiah

- A *messiah* is an “anointed one”—someone chosen to fulfill a special purpose.
- God’s promised Messiah is Jesus.
- His Purpose

He came to Earth to fulfill the Old Testament Law.	Matthew 5:17
He gave us an example of sacrificial love by caring for others and by giving up His life for us.	Matthew 20:28
He reached out to sinners in a way no one else could.	Mark 2:17
He offered salvation with eternal life.	John 3:16–17
He offered abundant life, as well.	John 10:10
He gave us light and truth through the knowledge of God the Father.	John 12:44–50
He established believers as heirs of God—as His own children, who could claim their Father’s blessing.	Galatians 4:4–5

Jesus came to Earth to connect us back to God.

• **His Identity** _____

- We call Jesus the *Son of God* because He is of the same essence as God.

- Jesus is the only begotten of God—because He *is* God.

• **His Ministry** _____

- Teaching God's Truth
- Showing God's Love

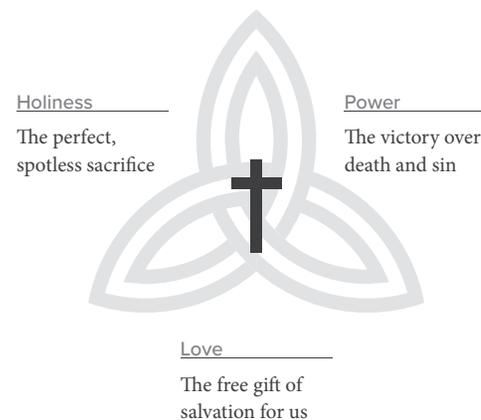
• **His Sacrifice** _____

- He became our sin and endured our punishment (2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 27:46).
- But He rose again, showing power over sin and death itself (Luke 24:5–7)

The Gospel of Christ

We are lost and powerless in our sin. We deserve death, judgment, and separation from God (Rom. 3:23).
But Jesus died to pay for our sin, and He rose to show His power over death (1 Cor. 15:3–4, 56–57).
If we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior—if we accept His sacrifice for our sin—God will forgive our sin and consider us as righteous as Christ (Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:22).
We don't need to fear the penalty for our sin (Rom. 6:23).
Instead, we believers can now live in a way that is holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1).

The God of the Gospel



Exercises

Read Matthew 27:24–61.

As the Creator God Himself, Jesus designed the laws of right and wrong. He alone decides whether we are perfectly righteous or we deserve eternal punishment.

Yet because He loves us, He became our sin and bore all the punishment that we deserve. He chose to take all the consequences of sin on Himself, even though sin and evil were our fault.

STUDENT MANUAL PAGES

In the following table, briefly describe the suffering that Jesus endured for our sake.

v. 26	Pilate ordered Him whipped.
vv. 28–30	Soldiers mocked Him and beat a crown of thorns into His head.
v. 31	He was crucified.
v. 35	Soldiers gambled away His clothing.
vv. 37–44	He was mocked by those watching Him die. People blasphemed His work.
vv. 46–50	God the Father somehow turned away from Him.

The Gift and the Giver

According to James 1:17, every good gift comes directly from God. Unfortunately, we sometimes value the gift over the Giver—placing our trust in wealth, circumstances, and relationships, instead of in the God who controls all these things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Like David in Psalm 37:1–4, we should delight first in God Himself, who gives us the desires of our hearts. And as Jesus commanded in Matthew 6:25–34, we should not stress over earthly needs, but instead seek God’s kingdom first.

In this passage, we see just a glimpse of what we deserve without God—pain, derision, and separation from Him. But as we read this horrific account, we can begin to appreciate God’s love for us. We see how far He went to redeem us back to Himself.

- Read Matthew 28:1–7. Did sin and death defeat Jesus? *No.* _____

Christ revealed that He had the power to save us from our own sins. He did this not because of who we are or what we’ve done, but because He loves us and cherishes us.

To receive this gift, we simply believe in the *Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 16:29–31).

- **Jesus**—because He is the real, historical figure who died and rose from the dead.
- **Christ**—because He is the Anointed One sent to save us from sin.

- **Lord**—because He is God our Ruler, deserving of all our worship and obedience, who has the standing to forgive us when we ask.

We trust God to make us righteous. Our actions do nothing—He simply saves those who ask.

Reflections

For this section, take some time to think about the work that Christ has done in your life. Answer the following questions as best you can, even if you don’t remember some of the details. No one’s story is the same, so don’t worry if your memories don’t sort neatly into the questions below. Simply reflect on your spiritual journey thus far.

Beginning Your Journey

If you have not yet accepted Christ as your Savior, please consider talking with a mature Christian in your family or church. God offers salvation for free. We can’t earn it—we simply *ask* for it. This book will encourage you to have better relationships, but none is more important than your relationship with God.

- Name _____
- How I’d describe myself before I accepted Christ:

- The things that discouraged me from accepting Christ:

Peace in the Storm

Meditating on Your Most Important Relationship

Read John 17.

This passage records Christ's prayer the night before His crucifixion.

- What was Christ's primary purpose in coming to Earth (vv. 1, 6)?
- Who was Christ praying for (v. 20)?
- What was His motivation? What blessing did He want for us (v. 26)?