

LOVING THE REAL GOD





Central Scripture:
“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”
(Genesis 2:7).

LOVING THE REAL GOD

LESSON #1: GOD RELATES

Key Ideas

- The real God created us with the capacity to relate to Him, and He desires to have an intimate, loving relationship with each one of us.
- It is important that we take steps to maintain and nurture our relationship with God, just as we would with any other relationship that is important to us.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Disciples will serve the Lord (L1) through practicing thanksgiving in all things.

Supplementary Resources Available for this Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com
www.tangle.com - God's Picture Skit - Lifehouse
www.tangle.com - More - Matthew West
www.tangle.com - God of Wonders - Third Day

*** Optional Activity

You may wish to lead into the opening discussion by arranging ahead of time for a few young people to perform brief dramatic skits depicting what happens when various essential aspects of healthy relationships are missing. For example, one skit could portray two people who can never seem to arrange their busy schedules so they can be together, another could feature two people who are dishonest to one another, and a third could illustrate a relationship in which the two people clearly have no common interests. You could involve the rest of the group by asking them to brainstorm as to what the eventual consequences might be in each of these situations.



Starting the Discussion

Begin the lesson by asking the group to brainstorm a list of things that are necessary for a good relationship. Possible answers might include quality time together, common interests, good communication, honesty, a willingness to apologize and offer forgiveness, and mutual feelings of affection, appreciation, and respect. As they offer suggestions, you might want to list them on a marker board or a piece of poster board so that they can be viewed and referred to throughout the lesson.

Once you have a list of several important aspects of a good relationship, choose a few and ask the group to consider what generally happens to a relationship when each of those aspects is missing. (For example, if honesty is missing from a relationship, the inevitable result will be hurt feelings and lack of trust). Emphasize the fact that each of the essential characteristics of a good relationship that you have listed must be present in order for the relationship to function in a healthy way, and that the absence of even one of them often results in conflict and pain.

Engaging the Text

Read Genesis 2:7 to the group, highlighting the fact that this passage represents the tangible beginning of God's relationship with humankind. Stress the important truth that, unlike the plants, animals, and other elements of God's creation, we have been granted the unique capacity to enter into relationship with Him. Thus, the real God is a God who desires to relate to each of us in an intimate way.

Review the statements made in the GC2 Note for Genesis 2:7. *During the first five days of creation, the Creator simply spoke things into existence, but on the sixth day, God related. God breathed life into man, going first to provide and establish the opportunity for a relationship with man.*



Considering Him

Encourage the students to consider the incredible truths that are revealed in this one passage:

- God could have created you in any way He pleased, but He chose to create you so that you could be in relationship with Him!
- No other part of God's creation gets to relate to Him like we do!
- God created you with the capacity to love and relate to Him; He didn't demand it, control it or manipulate the relationship. He simply created you in love and invites you to love Him back.
- You get to have a relationship with the Creator of the universe!

Next, challenge the group to consider the idea that the things they identified as being critical aspects of healthy relationships with others are also essential in their relationship with God. Take a few moments to explore several items on the list they made, helping students to see how each one might apply to their relationship with God. For example, quality time with God might consist of regular prayer, Bible study, and worship. Sharing common interests with God might mean being concerned about things that Jesus Himself demonstrated a deep concern for (such as caring for the poor and the sick, showing compassion to people regardless of their faults and encouraging others to follow Him). Honest communication and necessary apologies might occur within the context of confession of sins. An attitude of appreciation might be conveyed through faithful expressions of gratitude. Use these examples to make the point that having a relationship with God is not simply about a one-time decision, but that it requires consistent attention and expressions of love, just like any other relationship that is important.



Questions for Small Group Interaction

(As the leader, be sure to have your own responses to these questions. Model appropriate vulnerability and your own insight. Students won't go any "deeper" than what you have modeled. Be real!)

Making it **REAL**



1. At times, is it difficult for you to believe that you can have an intimate, personal relationship with the Creator of the universe, or that God wants to have that kind of relationship with you? Why or why not?

It is/isn't hard for me to believe that God wants to have a personal, real relationship with me because...

(For example: I sometimes have a hard time believing that God wants to have a relationship with me. It's amazing, awesome and too hard to get my head around sometimes. At other times, I believe it and I am so incredibly grateful for it. The God of the Universe notices me and wants to hang out with me!)

2. Look at the list of essential aspects of a healthy relationship that we made earlier. Which ones do you feel are present in your relationship with God? Which ones might be missing? (As the leader, be sure to give your own examples. And be real with your students!)

One of the good/healthy parts of my relationship with God is ...

But I think _____ might be missing in my relationship with God.

(For example: One of the good/healthy parts of my relationship with God is that I am pretty good at confessing when I'm wrong. But when I think about the "spending time together" aspect of a healthy relationship, I realize that I don't spend near enough time talking to God. I assume He's there and glad that He is, but I don't tell Him everything I'm thinking or feeling. I wonder if God wants me to be more straight with Him.)



Experiencing God's Word

Consider what great things He has done for us.

1 Samuel 12:24

Encountering Jesus

Invite students to accept an invitation from the prophet, Samuel. This Old Testament preacher challenged the Israelites to “consider what great things He has done for us” (1 Samuel 12:24).

As you facilitate this experience of God's Word, play soft, instrumental music and read the following aloud to your students. You may also want to use or create some of the

Let's consider the great things that God has done for us. Please take the next few moments and consider some of the thoughts that God has for us. Psalm 139:17 says, “How precious are God's thoughts to us!” Here are just a few of His thoughts toward you:

GOD'S THOUGHTS...

I am the Lord, God in heaven above and on the earth beneath, there is no other. (Deuteronomy 4:39).

I fashioned the earth and all there is in it, but I created my masterpiece, when I created you (Ephesians 2:10).

I thought carefully about you and just how you would be different from all other things I created. Only you would be able to talk with Me, hear from Me and relate to Me. I have no other agenda, but to share life and love with you (Psalm 139:13-18).

Yes, I have written down my laws and commandments and I want you to follow them. But those commandments reflect my heart of love for you. My Book and my laws are for your good, because my nature is one of grace and mercy (Deuteronomy 10:13).



love...

*I am slow to anger and abound in love and faithfulness
(Exodus 34:6).*

*Finally my created one, I will never leave you or abandon you - you
never have to be alone (Hebrews 13:5). Because you are my created
one, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will
be able to separate you from Me (Romans 8:39).*

(Ask students to stand as you read this truth) *Now stand still and
consider the wondrous works of your God (Job 37:14). Look around
you. There's evidence of Me and My love for you everywhere. I'm
here for you.*

Making it **REAL**



Invite students to complete this sentence with a partner or in a small group:

*I feel _____ as I reflect on God's heart and how He
wants a relationship with me.*

(For example: I feel curious. This lesson has made me want to know God a little more.)

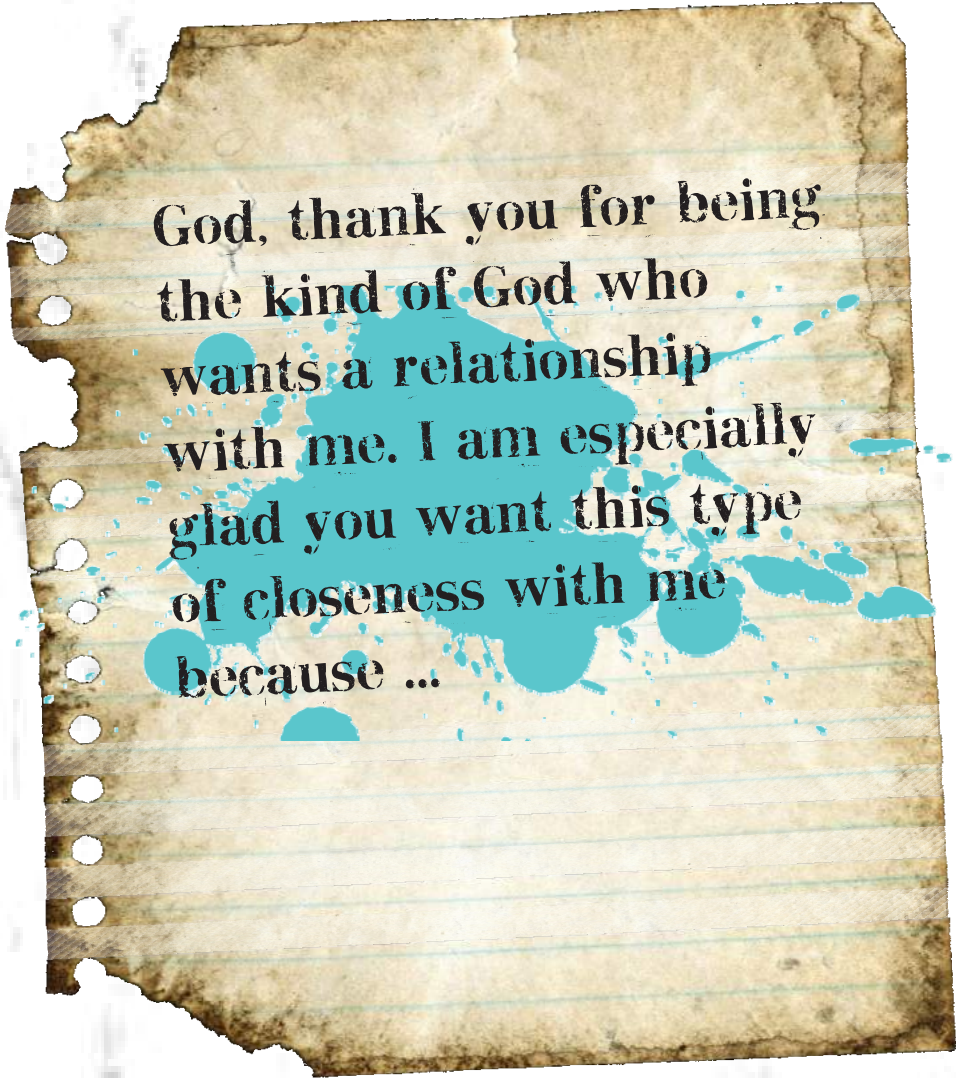
Imparting my Life

Challenge students to share their reflections about God's heart with someone outside the group. Encourage students to talk about their amazement, curiosity or gratitude that God desires to relate to us.



Closing prayer...

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving with a partner or small group. Encourage one another to express gratitude for the chance to have a relationship with God. Encourage one another to express a desire to have a closer, healthy relationship with God.



God, thank you for being
the kind of God who
wants a relationship
with me. I am especially
glad you want this type
of closeness with me
because ...



Family Discussion Page

1. Together as a family, watch one of the videos that dramatically displays God's creation. Check out www.tangle.com or www.myimpactexperience.com or rent/watch videos available from other sources. Talk about your favorite scenes in nature.

My favorite scene was _____ because
I like _____.

(For example: My favorite scenes are always of the steep mountains because I like rock climbing so much. I can just imagine what it would be like to climb some of those cliffs and how great it would feel when I made it to the top.)

2. Take turns reading the "God's Thoughts" passage aloud or review the resources on www.myimpactexperience.com. When you are finished, complete the sentences below:

Please take the next few moments and consider some of the thoughts that God has for us. Psalm 139:17 says, "How precious are God's thoughts to us!" Here are just a few of His thoughts toward you:

GOD'S THOUGHTS

I am the Lord, God in heaven above and on the earth beneath, there is no other. (Deuteronomy 4:39).

I fashioned the earth and all there is in it, but I created my masterpiece, when I created you (Ephesians 2:10).

I thought carefully about you and just how you would be different from all other things I created. Only you would be able to talk with Me, hear from Me and relate to Me. I have no other agenda, but to share life and love with you (Psalm 139:13-18).



Finally my created one, I will never leave you or abandon you - you never have to be alone (Hebrews 13:5).

Because you are my created one, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate you from Me (Romans 8:39).

Now stand still and consider the wondrous works of your God (Job 37:14). Look around you. There's evidence of Me and My love for you everywhere. I'm here for you.

Invite each family member to complete this sentence:
I feel _____ as I reflect on God's heart and how He wants a relationship with me because ...



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note through out the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion tool.

1. Read the GC2 Note for Genesis 2:7. It reveals an important truth about how you are like God! What feelings do you have about this truth?

2. The GC2 Note for Genesis 2:7 gives five of the ways that we can relate to the Creator of the universe. Which of these appeals to you and why?

3. The GC2 Note for Genesis 2:7 concludes with an amazing thought about what God is hoping for. What is it? How does that impact your view of God?





Central Scripture

"Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him"

LOVING THE REAL GOD

LESSON #2: A GOD OF GRACE AND MERCY

Key Idea

- The real God is a God who longs to bless us and who extends grace and mercy to us in spite of our failures.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcomes: Disciples will serve the Word (W6) by encountering Jesus in the Word for deepened transformation in Christ-likeness. They will serve His people (P4) by seeing people as needing BOTH redemption from sin AND intimacy in relationships, addressing both human fallen-ness and aloneness.

Supplementary Resources Available for this Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com

www.tangle.com - Parable of the Prodigal Son - Jesus of Nazareth

www.tangle.com - Only Grace - Matthew West

*** Optional Activity

One way to introduce the central theme for this lesson is to divide the young people into small groups and challenge each group to collectively come up with written definitions, word pictures, visual art or stories that illustrate the words grace and mercy. After allowing them sometime to brainstorm and come up with their definitions, have one spokesperson for each small group share their ideas with the entire group. (If you wish, you might allow the young people to vote for their favorite definition/illustration of each word and award a small prize to the members of the group(s) that came up with them.



Starting the Discussion

After completing the introductory activity (or in its place), emphasize to the group that, while words such as grace and mercy are commonly repeated in Christian settings, it is important for us to gain a full understanding of what such terms actually mean. Then explain that, grace means God's freely-given favor and love (which we could never earn or deserve), while the closely-related term mercy essentially refers to God's attitude of compassion and kindness toward us in the face of our failures and His desire to restore us to a right relationship with Him rather than coldly making sure that we receive the punishment that our actions rightly deserve.

Emphasize that, in order to see God as He truly is, we must understand that He is fundamentally a God of grace and mercy.

Engaging the Text

Read Isaiah 30:18 to the group, being sure to give them some context for the passage by explaining that these were the words of God spoken through the prophet Isaiah to God's chosen people, the Israelites, during a period when they had become extremely rebellious and disobedient.

Earlier in this chapter, God has proclaimed through Isaiah that He will discipline the Israelites for their wickedness, but He now emphasizes that He will also lovingly and mercifully restore them. Thus, even before the discipline has occurred, God is already looking forward to the joyous celebration that will take place when He extends grace to His people.

Isaiah's message called for a certain course of action by the people of Israel. His vision describes the rebellious nature of people and yet reveals God as the One who saves, helps and restores. Isaiah reminded the Israelites of some of the evidences of their rebellion. The people of Israel are not much different than you and me. Have we shown some of the same rebellion against the things of God?



- Have we trusted in our own knowledge, strength or effort only to find that we didn't know, couldn't do it or weren't sufficient in our selves? (Isaiah 30:1-3)
- Have we ever lied, been deceitful or told less than the truth? (Isaiah 30:9)
- Have we refused to hear or abide by God's laws? (Isaiah 30:9-11)
- Have there been times when we have demonstrated "unclean lips" through gossip, slander, sarcasm, rage or angry outbursts?
- Have there been any ways in which we have fallen short of God's standard?

After establishing this framework, challenge the group to consider the important truth that, while our sinfulness may sometimes lead to painful consequences (as was the case with the Israelites in Isaiah's time), God's nature toward us remains one of grace and mercy. He takes great delight in showering us with blessings, and is deeply grieved when we bring suffering on ourselves through our disobedience. He waits patiently for us to abandon our self-destructive behavior and run to Him—and, like the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), He waits not with a stern lecture or a harsh punishment, but with open arms.

Isaiah 30:18 confirms: *Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him.* The Apostle Paul reiterates this pattern of our rebellious conduct and the Lord's mercy in Ephesians 2:1-5: *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*



Questions for Small Group Interaction

Making it **REAL**



1. Do you ever find yourself being unmerciful to other people—perhaps by reporting other's bad behavior in the hopes that they will be disciplined, trying to prove others wrong, embarrassing someone in public, or simply refusing to pay someone attention at all?

I am sometimes unmerciful to people when ...

(For example: I am sometimes unmerciful to people when I know they have done something to deliberately hurt me or when they've broken a promise over and over again.)

Imparting My Life

2. As you consider the fact that the Lord lovingly shows mercy to you in spite of all your failures, how might this impact your relationship with others? Be specific about changes you could make.

I realize that God's mercy for me is available in spite of my failures.

This could impact my relationship with _____ by ...

(For example: This could impact my relationship with my mom by making me sensitive to her needs. God's mercy for me can help me give mercy to her.)

lovingly...



3. Before this lesson, did you see God as a God who is eager to show grace and mercy to us, or did you tend to view Him as a God who is more interested in exposing our mistakes or disciplining us for them?

Before this lesson, I have viewed God as One who looks at my mistakes and ...

(For example: Before this lesson, I have viewed God as One who looks at my mistakes and shakes His head and says, 'When will she ever get it?'.)

Experiencing God's Word—Encountering Jesus

Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. Isaiah 30:18

Invite the students to join you in a meditation that illustrates the kind of God who rises to show us compassion. Use media and/or music to complement this meditation. With quiet words and a gentle spirit, ask the students to remember:

Think back to those mistakes you've made. Remember the ways in which you may have ignored God's laws or refused to live by them. Remember those times when you thought you knew what was best, only to find out that you were wrong. Reflect on the scenes of your life when you've gotten in trouble with your parents, your teachers, the authorities or God.

Remember any times when you knew people were mad at you or disappointed in you because of something you did or failed to do. Remember the times and the ways when you have failed, blown it, messed up, or fallen short.

As the leader, be sure to give your own brief examples at this point. Pause and ask the students to silently indicate that they've remembered such a time. Reassure the students that they are not going to be asked to talk about these remembrances - you just want to know that they can relate to the experience.)

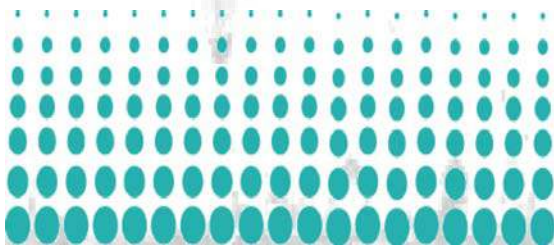


Now imagine that in the pain of these moments you've left your house. You've gone for a walk or gone for a drive. You're trying to clear your head and heart of the guilt, regret, hurt or anger that you're feeling at the moment.

Just as you round the corner and see the your house, you notice that Jesus is waiting for your return. When He sees you in the distance, He is moved with compassion. He doesn't even wait for you to arrive ... He runs to you! He leaps quickly and anxiously off the front porch because He can't wait to see you. He hugs you and whispers in your ear.

Jesus doesn't give a lecture or criticism. He doesn't fuss at you or remind you of how you've messed up. He acknowledges your behavior; Jesus knows the consequences of your sin. He's fully aware of how things have gone wrong, but His voice is filled with care. Christ's eyes are kind and His body language is gentle and relaxed as He talks with you. Jesus tells you He loves you and that His mercy is fully available to you.

Luke 15 and Isaiah 30 remind us that the real Jesus, the real God waits to be gracious to us and longs to be merciful to us. Although we may suffer consequences as a result of our sinfulness, God's chief desire is not to punish or humiliate us, but to restore and bless us. How does that make you feel? How does it move your heart?



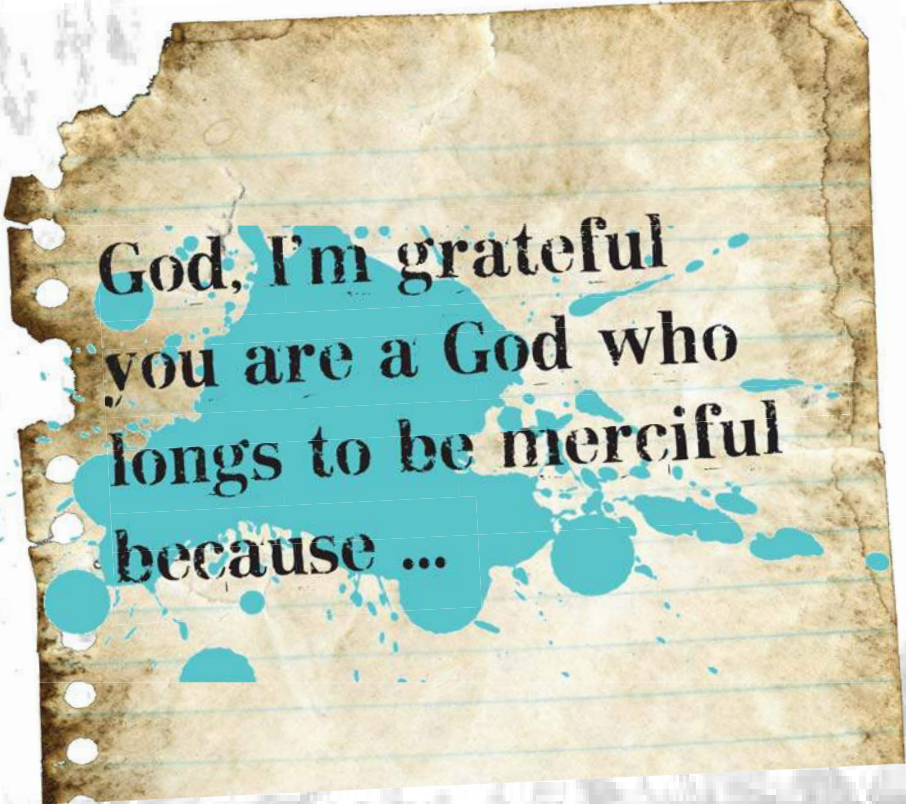
Take a few moments to talk about your responses with a partner or small group.

As I imagine Christ, and think about how He can't wait to welcome me and have mercy on me in spite of my failures, my heart is filled with _____.

(For example: As I imagine Christ, and think about how He can't wait to welcome me and have mercy on me in spite of my failures, my heart is filled with amazement. I can't really imagine a God like that, but it sure makes me want to know Him.)

Closing Prayer

Lead the group in prayer, inviting them to express their gratitude to God for His mercy and grace.



God, I'm grateful
you are a God who
longs to be merciful
because ...



Family Discussion Page

1. Read the story of the prodigal son from Luke 15 and/or watch the parable of this story from the Jesus of Nazareth DVD (or play a clip from www.tangle.com - search the "Parable of the Prodigal Son.") Then talk about some of the times when you have needed God's compassion and mercy. Talk about some of the times when you have needed compassion and mercy from others. (Parents share first during this time - tell about a time from your own growing up, when you needed compassion and mercy!)

I remember needing God's compassion and mercy when ... *OK*

I remember needing compassion and mercy from another person when ...

(For example: I remember needing compassion and mercy from another person when I wrecked my parents' car. And because of the wreck, my parents found out that I had been in a place I wasn't allowed to go.)

Make this a time of acceptance and understanding among family members. Be sure not to judge or point out the failures of another person. This is a time when each person shares about their OWN need for mercy.

2. View some of the music or media (provided on www.myimpactexperience.com) that reflects God's heart in the story of the prodigal son and the picture of God's response in Isaiah 30:18. Or ask each person to read the following meditation:

Imagine that you've left your house one day ...all because you've messed up, you've failed or blown it in some way. You've gone for a walk or gone for a drive. You're trying to clear your head and heart of the guilt, regret, hurt or anger that you're feeling at the moment.



Just as you round the corner and see the your house, you notice that Jesus is waiting for your return. When He sees you in the distance, He is moved with compassion. He doesn't even wait for you to arrive ... He runs to you! He leaps quickly and anxiously off the front porch because He can't wait to see you. He hugs you and whispers in your ear.

Jesus doesn't give a lecture or criticism. He doesn't fuss at you or remind you of how you've messed up. He acknowledges your behavior; Jesus knows the consequences of your sin. He's fully aware of how things have gone wrong, but His voice is filled with care. Christ's eyes are kind and His body language is gentle and relaxed as He talks with you. Jesus tells you He loves you and that His mercy is fully available to you.

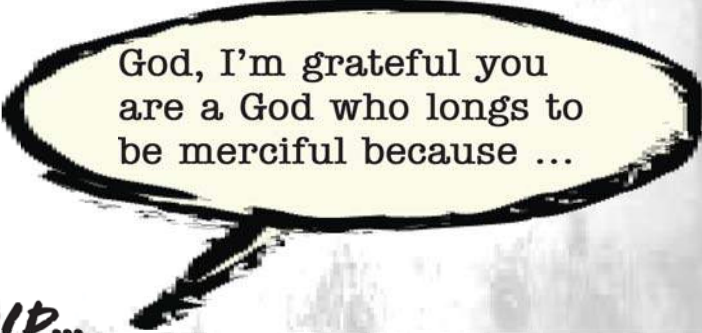
Luke 15 and Isaiah 30 remind us that the real Jesus, the real God waits to be gracious to us and longs to be merciful to us. Although we may suffer consequences as a result of our sinfulness, God's chief desire is not to punish or humiliate us, but to restore and bless us. How does that make you feel? How does it move your heart?

Take a few moments to talk about your responses with your family.

As I imagine Christ, and think about how He can't wait to welcome me and have mercy on me in spite of my failures, my heart is filled with _____.

(For example: As I imagine Christ, and think about how He can't wait to welcome me and have mercy on me in spite of my failures, my heart is filled with amazement. I can't really imagine a God like that, but it sure makes me want to know Him.)

Close your time with your family by praying together. Encourage everyone to pray one sentence out loud to God.



God, I'm grateful you are a God who longs to be merciful because ...

AND EVERYONE SAID...



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note through out the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion guide.

1. The GC2 Note for Isaiah 30:18 talks about 3 distorted views we may have about Jesus. Have you ever thought of Jesus in these ways?

2. Read the GC2 Note for Isaiah 30:18. This note encourages you to imagine yourself in the throne room of heaven. Put yourself in the scene. How do you feel?

3. Talk to a friend about this (possibly) new perspective or view of Jesus. Then pray the prayer of gratitude that's suggested in the GC2 Note for Isaiah 30:18.





Central Scripture
“He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing”
(Zephaniah 3:17).

LOVING THE REAL GOD

LESSON #3: HE REJOICES OVER YOU

Key Ideas

- The real God knows each one of us fully and intimately.
- The real God takes great delight in you and celebrates who you are... according to His heart.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcomes: Disciples will serve the Lord (L4) by rejoicing in their identity as “His beloved”. They will also (L7) enter often into Spirit-led praise and worship.

Supplementary Resources Available for this Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com

www.tangle.com - Amazed - Jared Anderson

www.tangle.com - My Beloved - Kari Jobe

Optional Activity

A good way to begin this lesson is to arrange ahead of time for two young people to present a dramatic skit in which they explore the theme of how God sees us. One young person should essentially portray him- or herself, and might simply mimic going through his or her everyday activities. The other young person should play God, offering commentary on the life of the first character and presenting in turn several different possible attitudes toward him or her. For example, in one scene the person portraying God might act like a “spiritual drill instructor,” carefully inspecting the other character and noting every minor flaw in his or her actions or attitudes. In another scene he or she might act more like a difficult-to-please parent, displaying perpetual disappointment with the other character. Yet another option would be for the person portraying God to act as if he or she is too busy or distracted to even notice the other character’s life at all. Finally, the person playing God should demonstrate celebration, joyful approval and a deep longing to show loving concern toward the other character.





Starting the Discussion

Following the skit (or in its place), introduce the lesson by explaining that this lesson focuses on how God sees us. Then ask a few volunteers to answer the following questions: What do you think goes through God's mind when He considers your life?

What emotions might He experience when He looks at you? After a few young people have offered their answers, stress the fact that a key part of the process of coming to truly know and love the real God is gaining an accurate understanding of how He sees us. If we believe that God is distant and not particularly concerned with our lives, it will be difficult to feel that we can truly come to know Him. If we think that God is constantly inspecting us or disappointed with us, we will find it hard to love Him. It is only when we experience God's delight in us as His children, that we are freed to truly take delight in Him in turn.

Engaging the Text - Considering **HIM**

Read Zephaniah 3:17 to the group, impressing upon them the wondrous truth that God does, in fact, love them deeply, and that He rejoices over each of them as a unique and precious child. You may wish to supplement this key Scripture with other passages such as Psalm 139:1–16 (which bears witness to God's intimate knowledge of us), Psalm 145:18 (which attests that God is never distant from us or unaware of our needs), and Psalm 147:11 (which again speaks of the Lord delighting or taking pleasure in His children). In particular, you may wish to use the Psalm 139 passage to emphasize the important truth that God has complete and intimate knowledge of all of our actions, words, thoughts, and attitudes—including those that are sinful, self-destructive, and hurtful to others—and yet, as Zephaniah tells us, He delights in us.



We could interpret this verse in this way: “God is so pleased with us, that He dances over us! While we may be completely unaware, God sings and dances over us because of His love for us.”

You might also explore with the group, the important difference between God’s unconditional love for us and the imperfect love that we extend to one another, which is often conditional upon our behavior. You may also wish to stress that, God’s love for us is not diminished by our failures. And as we experience more and more of His never-ending love, it produces in us a desire to serve Him more faithfully.

Making it **REAL**



Questions for Small Group Interaction

1. Do you ever struggle to believe that God could take delight in you? Have you tended to picture Him responding to you in a more negative way, or had trouble believing that He took notice of you at all? Describe some of the other ways you might have seen God.

(As the leader, model appropriate vulnerability by sharing your own struggles with believing in a God who delights in us.)

(For example: *I know that my early church experiences played a big role in my view of God. I had church leaders who would ridicule us if we didn’t know the answer to a Bible question. The whole atmosphere was very strict; kids were never allowed to be heard or “enjoy” church.*)



(For example: *I'm sure that my relationship with my grandfather impacted my view of God. My grandfather helped my view of God. Because of the long fishing trips with him and the great talks we could have by the water, I can believe that we have a God who takes notice of us. That image of a patient, welcoming grandfather, helps me "see" a God who rejoices over me.*)

2. How do you show others that you are happy about knowing them? How would we know that you are proud to be someone's family/friend/boyfriend or girlfriend? How could we tell that you are glad to be in relationship with them?

Experiencing God's Word

Give praise to the Lord for He is good. Psalm 135:3

Encountering Jesus

Do you ...

Talk about them a lot?

Carry or show their picture?

Draw their name or initials?

Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us that God is happy about knowing us, proud of and delighted in us. He throws a party when He thinks about us.



Lead the group through a closing meditation by either reading the GC2 Note from Zephaniah 3:17 or using the media elements that complement this lesson. Possible videos for this experience can be found at: www.tangle.com. Lead the students in a time of reflection so that they spend intentional time encountering Jesus and how He relates to us.

After the time of meditation, ask the students to reflect on their answers to these questions and then share with a partner or small group.

How does your heart respond when you consider a God who is acquainted with all of your ways and longs to be involved in your life (Psalm 139:3)?

How does it make you feel to reflect on the amazing truth that God takes great delight in and rejoices over you?

Encourage students to respond to these questions and share with one another.

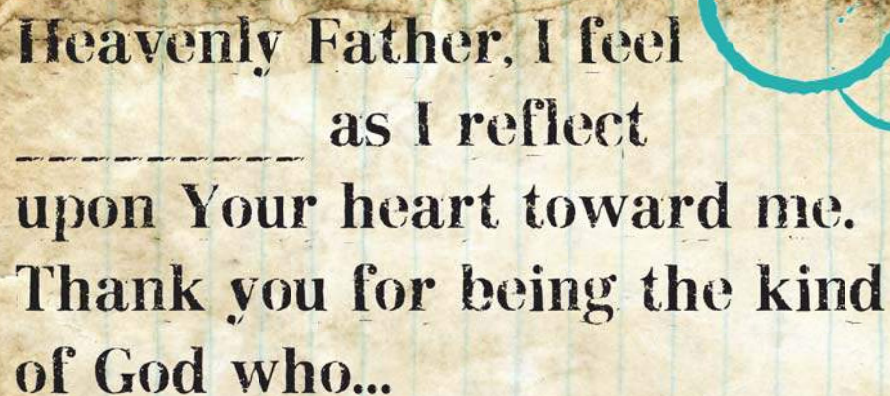
As I consider the real God, who rejoices over me and looks forward to spending the day with me, my heart is filled with _____.

Encourage students to reflect on the wondrous truth that, when they awake each morning, the Creator of the universe looks upon them with love and tenderness and joyfully anticipates sharing another day with them. Encourage them to offer a prayer expressing their gratitude and wonder to the God who rejoices over them. Invite them to experience Psalm 135:3 “Give praise to the Lord for He is good.”



Closing Prayer

Prayers might sound like:



Heavenly Father, I feel
_____ as I reflect
upon Your heart toward me.
Thank you for being the kind
of God who...



Family Discussion Page

1. Take time to remember some favorite birthday memories. Ask each person in your family to finish this sentence:

One of my favorite birthday memories was when ...

I especially liked that birthday because ...

As each person responds, be careful not to discount or make fun of others. Make this a fun discussion about positive memories. As family members talk about their memories, be sure to celebrate with each other. Your celebrations might sound like or look like:

I'm glad you have that memory.

Wasn't that fun? What a great day!

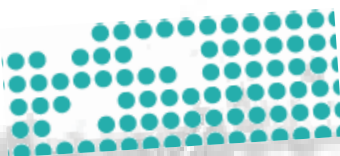
That was a special birthday. I'm happy you had so much fun.

Giving a high five

Giving a hug

Talk together about these important points: Birthdays are fun for a lot of reasons - the party, the presents, the friends and family. Birthdays are designed to celebrate how special you are.

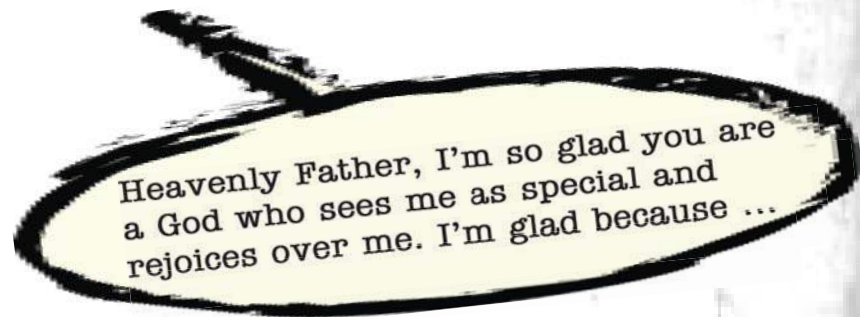
2. God tells us in Zephaniah 3:17 that He celebrates us - He rejoices over us! In other words, when God sees us, He celebrates how special we are to Him. Ask each person to respond to this statement:



When I imagine that our God sees me, knows all about me and still celebrates, I feel ...

I feel this way because ...

Finally, if you feel comfortable, spend some time in prayer as a family. Encourage each person to finish this sentence prayer:



special...



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note through out the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion guide.

1. The GC2 Note for Zephaniah 3:17 asks you to imagine Christ's facial expression as you woke up this morning? Is this a new way to see Jesus? Do you usually think of Jesus in this way?

2. The GC2 Note for Zephaniah 3:17 makes an important statement about God's perspective on the times that we've failed. What is it? And how do you feel about God's response?

3. What are you looking forward to today? Complete the sentence: I can't wait to _____. The GC2 Note for Zephaniah 3:17 reminds us that God can't wait to _____. How do you feel towards a God like that?





Central Scripture

"Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one'' (Mark 12:29).

LOVING THE REAL GOD

LESSON #4: LOVING THE REAL GOD

Key Ideas

- The greatest commandment for us as believers is to love God fully and sincerely, then to love others as we have been loved.
- In order to genuinely love God, we must first know Him and see Him as He truly is. And in order to genuinely love others, we must learn to love God.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcomes: Disciples will serve the Lord (L5) by living with a passionate longing for purity and to please Him in all things. They will also serve His people (P3) by discerning the relational needs of others with a heart to give of His love.

Supplementary Resources Available for this Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com

www.wingclips.com - Evan Almighty - Carjacker

www.youtube.com - Nationwide Commercial - Sisters of Perpetual Mercy

www.tangle.com - How Great is Our God - Chris Tomlin

www.youtube.com - Ian McIntosh - Everything Good



Starting the Discussion

Ask the group to share several different perceptions of God's nature and character that are common among their peers. You might wish to have them think of some occupational metaphors that illustrate these perceptions (for example, God might conceivably be viewed by some as a policeman, a shepherd, a school principal, a teacher, a judge, a doctor, a dictator, a stern but loving father, a well-meaning but weak old man, a disinterested spectator, a fairy-tale character, or even a terrorist). Pick a few of their suggestions and ask them to speculate as to how these views of God might have developed. Then ask them which of these metaphors they think is most accurate.

*** Optional Activity

Alternatively, rather than asking young people to come up with different characterizations of God, you might arrange ahead of time for a few people to bring some of the more common perceptions of God to life by acting them out in character (perhaps even in costume). You might also illustrate some of the different ways in which God is portrayed in the popular media. You might do this by gathering a few excerpts from popular song lyrics or by showing clips from recent films or television episodes.

Before you close the discussion, propose this idea: All of us in some way, have misperceptions about God. In some way, we all have trouble seeing God as He really is. 1 John 4:12 reminds us that none of us has seen God, so our perceptions of Him are imperfect at best. That poses two problems:

1. By not seeing God as He truly is, we may find it harder to love Him.
2. And if we have trouble loving Him, we may often have trouble loving others.



Ask students to reflect on how God was portrayed in the exercises/discussions above:

- How easy or hard would it be to love a God who related to you like a judge? teacher? a stern but loving father? well-meaning, but weak old man? etc.
- How might your view of God influence how you relate to others? Could there be any connection?

Engaging the Text

Read Mark 12:28–31 to the group, briefly explaining the context of Jesus' words and emphasizing the centrality of the Great Commandment to the Christian life (if possible, you may want to display the passage on a projection screen during this time). Then highlight verses 29–30, explaining that Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6:4–5, a portion of Moses' instructions to the Israelites prior to their entry into the Promised Land that became the central statement of faith of the Jewish people. Emphasize the important fact that before Moses told the Israelites to love God (v. 5), he made a declaration concerning who God really was—the Lord, the one and only true God in a world filled with false gods and idols (v. 4).

When Christ gave us the Great Commandment, He actually referenced the Old Testament *Shema*, the Hebrew call to worship. The *Shema* begins with a declaration about the God of the Hebrew people. During Old Testament times, when pagan and idolatrous cultures were the norm and nations frequently worshipped gods of their own making, the first declaration of the Hebrew nation was about the one true God. The Hebrew call to worship clearly defined the One who is worthy of their adoration and loving obedience (See Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

We must also notice that before there was a call to love Him, there was a clear declaration of who He is. In much the same way, before we can truly come to love the Lord our God, we must come to see God as He truly is. Imagine what God's heart was toward you when you woke up this morning: Was He upset to see you? Did He even notice or could He have been excited? By seeing Him more clearly, we gain greater freedom to truly love Him.



Many of us may have never even considered our view of God. We have believed certain things about Him and have never questioned them or been challenged with an alternative. Take a moment to consider that key to loving others well is loving the Lord well, and key to loving the Lord well is seeing Him as He really is.

Pause and pray to know Him better:

“Lord, as I can better come to know You, I want to!” Help me see You as You really are so I can love You with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength.”

Considering **HIM**

But what would the Israelites have considered as they remembered their One, true God? Because of their experiences through out the book of Exodus, the people of Israel would have known their God as One who:

- Protects** - The Israelites were protected from disease, plagues and death (Exodus 8:21-24, 9:2-6, 9:26, 12:12)
- Provides** or acts on our behalf - God provided resources to meet their needs (Exodus 12:35-36, 14:21-29)
- Rescues and keeps His promise** - God heard the cry of the Israelites, promised to save them and His promise came true. (Exodus 6:6-8, 12:41, 14:30-31)

It was this correct understanding of God’s identity that freed the Israelites (and later the followers of Jesus) to truly love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.



Stress to the group that, in the same way, they must first come to see God as He truly is if they are to love Him well, and tell them that you will be exploring various aspects of God's nature and character together over the coming weeks in order to further complete their understanding of Him.

Finally, remind the group that this journey of loving God is not only important for our relationship with Him, but it can have tremendous impact on our relationships with others (see question #2 for examples).

Making it **REAL**



Questions for Small Group Interaction

(As the leader, be sure to share your own responses to the questions below. Model both appropriate vulnerability and insight.)

Share how your view of God has developed and changed as you have grown up, and describe as fully as possible how you see God now.

In the past, I have seen God as ...

(For example: In the past, I have seen God as a stern dictator, just waiting for me to mess up.)

I tend to see God now as ...

(For example: I tend to see God now as a wise mentor who is hoping that I'll listen to his advice.)



2. There is often a correlation between our image of God, how well we love Him, and our relationship with other people.

- If I view God as a stern, inspecting dictator, I may tend to inspect other people. I might have a hard time giving grace to others, giving second chances or offering forgiveness.
- If I view God as one who is always disappointed with me, then I may come to believe that I could never measure up. I might then have trouble seeing the positive attributes in my self or other people. I might have trouble being grateful for God's blessings or appreciative of others' care for me.
- If I view God as distant or uninvolved, I may come to believe that God didn't notice my needs - so it may be hard to notice anyone else's. I may find it hard to trust other people. I may have trouble getting close to other people.
- If I view God as one who looks forward to being with me and is excited to love me, then I can respond to others in the same way. I can be free to notice other's needs. I am able to give care, love, grace and forgiveness because I have experienced those attributes with God.

Experiencing God's Word

Psalm 77:12 reminds us to “meditate on all His work and to talk of His deeds.”

Take a few minutes now to do just what the text says: meditate or reflect on God's work in your life. Since He is the same yesterday, today and forever, God wants to care for you just as He did for the Children of Israel.

Can you see His protection for you? Can you remember how He has provided for you and met your needs? Can you identify times when God has rescued you or spared you from trouble? Can you recall a promise that God has kept and made true in your life?



(As the leader, be sure to give personal examples here. Lead the students in a few moments of quiet reflection. You might pause and ask the Lord to remind each person of His care. Pray quietly for a few moments, while a reflective worship song is playing. Prompt their thoughts with general examples of how God might have worked in their life.)

Now talk of His deeds. Share what you've remembered with a partner or small group.

I can see God's protection for me when ...

I can remember God providing for me when ...

I can recall a promise that God made true in my life ...

After students have had a chance to talk, conclude with these thoughts: Psalm 8:3-9 shows an important progression. When we consider all that God has done for us, and remember all His work on our behalf, we can't help but conclude what the Psalmist concluded: *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!* (Psalm 8:9) When we get to know the God who protects, provides and keeps His promises, we can't help but love Him more. And then, as we learn to love Him, we are equipped to love others. We are empowered to love our family, friends and other people around us.

Imparting My Life

Challenge students to look for ways to impart their lives this week. Some ideas might include:

- Help others see and acknowledge times when God protected, provided or kept a promise. I could help _____ remember the ways God has shown His care.

I could provide for _____ by ...

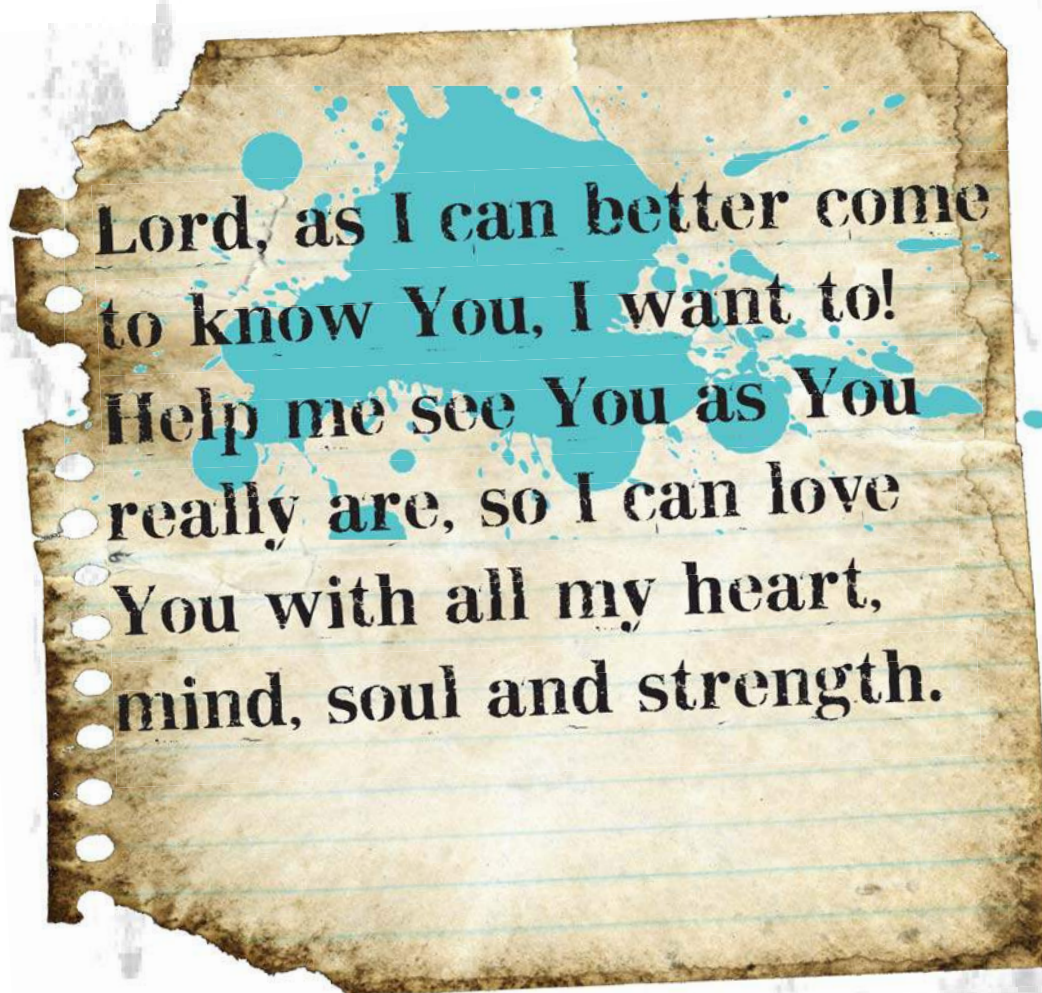
I could make and keep a promise for _____ by ...

I could protect _____ from ...



Closing Prayer...

Lead the group in prayer, encouraging them to ask God to help them see Him as He is, so that they may grow to love Him more. You may want to use the GC2 Notes from the *Impact Bible* as a way to prompt the closing prayers. Encourage students to thank God for all the ways that He has shown His love, care, provision and protection. Give love back to God by saying:



Family Discussion Page

1. As a family, watch a video or selection of videos in which an actor portrays the character of God (For example: Evan Almighty, www.wingclips.com) Discuss how the character of God is portrayed in the movie. Is God viewed as kind? compassionate? sarcastic? critical? judgmental? etc.

We all have different perceptions of God's nature and character. We might see God as stern or inspecting, stingy with forgiveness or reluctant to show grace. Some of us see God as always disappointed with us or never quite pleased with our behavior. Others see God as distant, uninvolved or only concerned with the "important people." Hopefully, there are also some of us who see God as excited to love us, thoroughly pleased to know us and One who looks forward to being with us.

Take turns sharing your view of God. There are no right or wrong answers here. Take this opportunity to assess how you really view God and then share that with your family. Accept all views and perspectives. This is not a time to teach, but a time to get to know one another in a little different way. (Parents, it is always important for you to share first, believing that you have also been on a journey to see God for who He really is!)

In the past, I have seen God as ...

(For example: In the past, I have seen God as distant and uninvolved. It was hard for me to imagine Him as pleased with me. I would often imagine God sitting in heaven and as He looked down at me, He shook His head: "Oh my, when will she get it?")



I tend to see God now as ...

(For example: I tend to see God now as One who is less disappointed in me, but still not very involved in my life. He's more like an objective by-stander ... just observing what happens with me.)

2. Next, set aside some time to reflect on God's care for your family. The real God looks forward to being with you and gets excited about loving you and providing for you. Talk together about the ways in which God has cared for the members of your family. You might remember the ways in which God:

- protected you?
- provided for you?
- rescued you or spared you from harm?
- answered a prayer for you?

Help one another see times when the Lord acted on your behalf. Help each other remember the ways that God has shown His care for you.

(For example: Isn't it amazing how God has given Dad some extra vacation this year? So many parents have lost their job. I'm grateful God has cared for our family by providing a great job for Dad AND extra vacation too! Or I'm so glad God spared us from harm when I lost my purse at the mall. That could have been incredibly damaging to our family's finances if my purse had gotten into the wrong hands. I'm grateful that someone was honest enough to turn it in.)



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

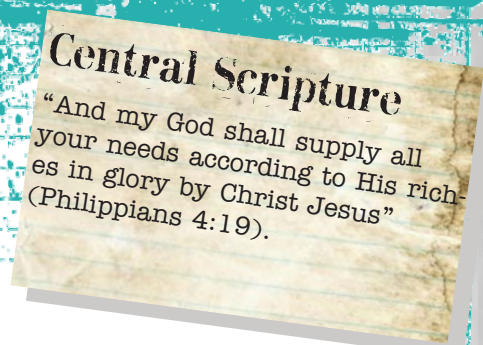
- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note through out the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion tool.

1. The GC2 Note for Mark 12:29 says that many of us believe certain things about God and have never been challenged with an alternative. Do you agree or disagree? And why?

2. The GC2 Note for Mark 12:29 points to one of the keys for loving relationships. What is it? And can you see how this key impacts your ability to have loving relationships?

3. The GC2 Note for Mark 12:29 challenges us to pray a prayer that may seem unusual. With a sincere heart, give it try and wait for God's response.





LESSON #5: A NEED-MEETING GOD

Key Idea

- The real God is a God who consistently acts to meet the many needs of His children.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Disciples will serve the Lord (L1) by practicing thanksgiving in all things.

Supplementary Resources Available for This Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com

www.tangle.com - In You - Mercy Me

Music by: Jason Morant - Bless the Lord

Optional Activity

A good way to open this session is to provide each young person with a sheet of paper and a pen or pencil. Then give them a few minutes to make a numbered list of as many different things as they can think of that they need to get through their daily routine—everything from true essentials like food, water, and oxygen, to power sources like electricity and gasoline, to basic household items like toothbrushes, combs, forks, spoons, sheets, towels, and toilet paper, to school supplies like paper, pens, and textbooks. At the end of the allotted time, find out who came up with the largest number of things and have him/her read the list aloud to the group. (You may also wish to award a small prize to the person with the longest list.) Then allow a few volunteers to add anything from their own lists that was not already mentioned.



Starting the Discussion

(If you elect not to do the activity, simply begin the session by asking a few volunteers to name some different things that they need on a daily basis.)

Chances are that most of the young people's responses will center on their physical needs and on their perceived needs for material things (most of which may actually be "wants" rather than needs, but many of which it would be difficult to imagine getting through the day without).

However, you should be sure to emphasize that we also have relational needs (such as our need for acceptance, attention, and encouragement), and spiritual needs (such as our need for God's peace and God's forgiveness) all of which must be taken into consideration as well. Then encourage students to reflect on how overwhelmingly large our list of daily requirements really is when we stop to examine it carefully.

Engaging the Text - Considering **HIM**

Read Philippians 4:19 to the group, highlighting the fact that Paul insists that the real God is fundamentally a need-meeting God. (You may wish to supplement this Scripture by reading or recounting Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25–30 concerning the ways in which He provides for even the birds and the flowers.) Then select a few of the needs that the young people listed earlier and discuss with them the ways in which God acts to provide them with these things. Be sure to carefully explore the multiple layers of divine provision that lay behind many of the things that we use daily.

needs...



For example, in order for us to enjoy a steak, God must first provide life for the cow, as well as oxygen, grain, and water to sustain that life. Then the cow must be butchered using metal instruments, and the meat must be packaged, refrigerated, and transported—all processes which require the use of God-created natural elements (such as iron, timber, ice, and petroleum), as well as modern technological innovations that were only made possible through God-given creativity and inspiration. Finally, we must have either fire or electricity (both God-created phenomena) with which to cook the meat, and of course a properly-functioning digestive system with which to consume it. If God failed to meet any one of the dozens of individual requirements that make up this chain, the need would remain unmet. Yet amazingly, God is both able and willing to continually perform the infinite number of creative and supervisory acts that are necessary to provide billions of people with everything that they require daily. Be sure to again emphasize that, just as significantly, God is also faithful to provide the things that we need on a spiritual and emotional level by giving us the possibility of direct communion with Him through prayer, the encouragement and consolation of His Word, and the ministry of His Spirit through others.

Questions for Small Group Interaction

(As the leader, be sure to answer the following questions for yourself. Model appropriate vulnerability and gratitude. Let the students see you brag on your God!)

Making it **REAL**



1. Choose a need from one of the lists in your small group and brainstorm together about all the ways in which God must provide just to ensure that that particular need is met. Consider how often we take God's provision for granted. How might that be true for you?



(For example: I have often taken my health for granted. God has given me the ability to play sports, hike, bike ride or whatever activity I wanted to try. I realized this year that my health is one of God's provisions.)

After my bike accident, it was a big deal for me to walk ... much less ride a bike again. I will forever be grateful for God meeting my need for physical strength.)

2. Share about a time when God provided for you or your family by meeting a physical or material need (such as a need for food, shelter, clothing, or finances) in a special way. What do you feel toward God as you remember His provision?

I remember God meeting my need when _____ and I feel _____ now because _____.

(For example: I remember God meeting our needs when my father was out of work. It was amazing how people from the neighborhood would just show up at our door with sacks of groceries. I feel amazed now because we didn't even ask those people for help. God just made it happen.)

3. Share about a time when God met one of your spiritual or emotional needs (such as a need for peace, forgiveness, acceptance, or comfort) in a special way. What do you feel toward God as you remember this provision?

I remember God meeting my need when _____ and I feel _____ now because _____.

(For example: I remember God meeting my need when I was really discouraged and frustrated about my relationship with my girlfriend. I was praying and asking God to show me what to do and just at the right moment, my friend walked into Starbucks. He was the perfect guy to help me. I feel so grateful now because I know God worked that out, and I know I would have messed up my relationship if it hadn't been for God's help.)



Remind students that they've been living out Scripture or experiencing God's Word. They have also been loving God with their responses. Psalm 103:2 reminds us not to forget the benefits of God. As they talked about God's provision, they were "not forgetting the benefits of the Lord." God feels loved when we acknowledge and thank Him for the ways He gives to us.

Experiencing His Word

Serve the Lord with gladness. Psalm 100:2

Encountering Jesus

Suggest that the students pray together in partners or small groups, encouraging them to offer words of gratitude for God's generous provision and to express their confidence that He will continue to meet all of their needs. You might remind the students of Matthew 6:25-33 and how it is because our Heavenly Father is a need-meeting God, that we can be free from worry. Challenge students to live out Psalm 100:2. Serving the Lord with gladness might sound like:

Imparting My Life

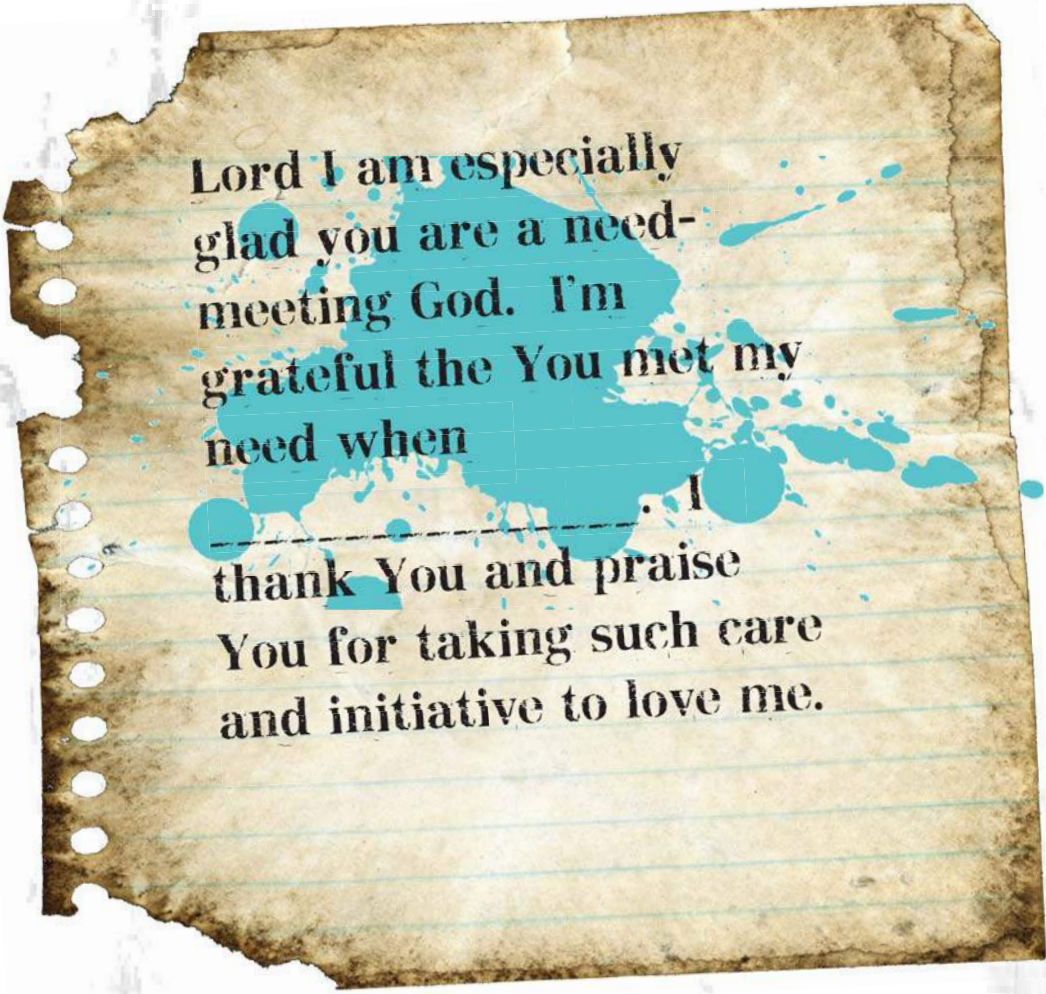
As students finish their prayer time, invite them to think about one need they might meet for someone else. Students might plan to meet someone's physical need: buying lunch for a friend, donating clothing, or helping out with chores around the house. Students might plan to meet someone's spiritual or emotional need by: accepting someone who is different, forgiving another person or being an example of peace in the midst of a conflict. Challenge students to specifically identify a way to impart their life.

I plan to meet a need for _____ by ...



Closing Prayer...

Close the time with a prayer of gratitude for a God who meets needs and ask Him to empower students to meet needs for others.



Lord I am especially
glad you are a need-
meeting God. I'm
grateful the You met my
need when _____ . I
thank You and praise
You for taking such care
and initiative to love me.



Family Discussion Page

1. If possible, go out to dinner as a family (eating at home together would work fine as well). Enjoy some conversation about the day, then take some time to appreciate what it took to get the food to your table, paying particular attention to how God provided or was involved in each step of the process.

For example, if you were able to enjoy a steak, God must first provide life for the cow, as well as oxygen, grain, and water to sustain that life. Then the cow must be butchered using metal instruments, and the meat must be packaged, refrigerated, and transported—all processes which require the use of God-created natural elements (such as iron, timber, ice, and petroleum), as well as modern technological innovations that were only made possible through God-given creativity and inspiration. Finally, we must have either fire or electricity (both God-created phenomena) with which to cook the meat, and of course a properly-functioning digestive system with which to consume it. If God failed to meet any one of the dozens of individual requirements that make up this chain, the need would remain unmet. Yet amazingly, God is both able and willing to continually perform the infinite number of creative and supervisory acts that are necessary to provide billions of people with everything that they require daily.

2. Talk about a time when God provided for your family by meeting a physical or material need (such as a need for food, shelter, clothing, or finances) in a special way. What do you feel toward God as you remember His provision? (Parents, be sure to share first.)

I remember God meeting my need when _____ and I feel _____ now because _____.



(For example: I remember God meeting our need for this house. I feel grateful that God allowed us to afford a house of our own. We no longer have to rent. I am thankful that God allowed us to have jobs that provide enough money for the house because we can now start saving for college and other expenses.)

3. Finally, talk about a time when God met one of your spiritual or emotional needs (such as a need for peace, forgiveness, acceptance, or comfort) in a special way. What do you feel toward God as you remember this provision? (Parents, be sure to share first.)

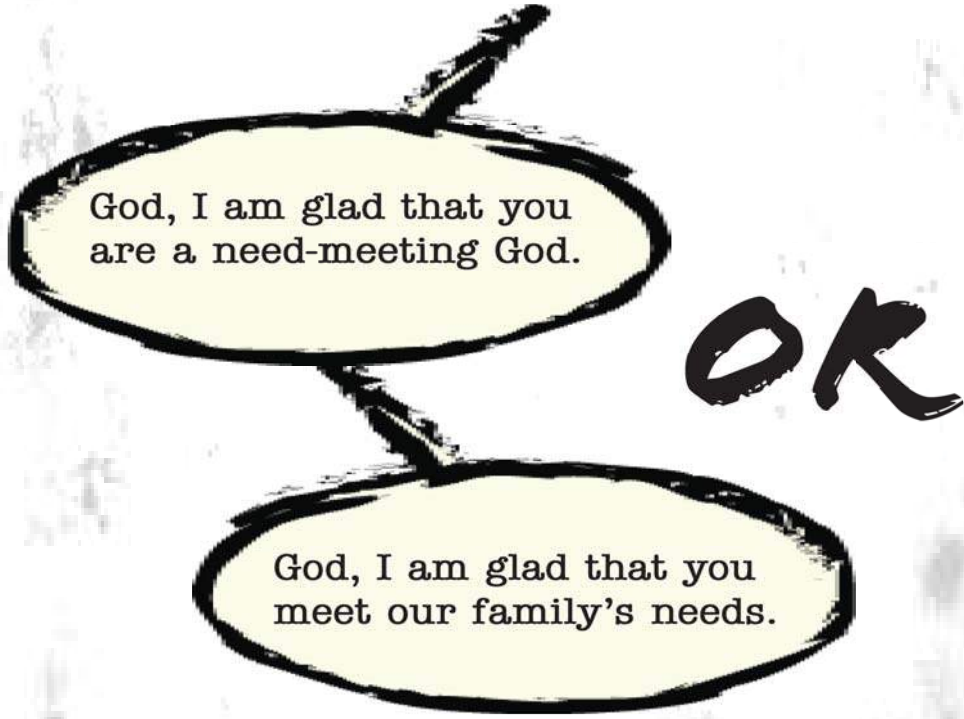


REAL



(For example: I remember God meeting my need for acceptance last year when I transferred to my new job. I believe God sent Emily to help me feel welcome in my new environment. I feel so loved by Emily and by God.)

If you feel comfortable, spend some time praying together as a family. Just a one-sentence prayer would be great! Encourage one another to live out one verse of the Bible. Psalm 100:2 reminds us to “serve the Lord with gladness.” This means that one way we can serve or please the Lord is by telling Him when our heart is glad. Our hearts are glad when we reflect on how God has provided for us. So could each family member say this one-sentence prayer:



God, I am glad that you
are a need-meeting God.

God, I am glad that you
meet our family's needs.



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note throughout the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion tool.

1. The GC2 Note for Philippians 4:19 tells us that Paul (the author) uses the words, “my God” in an unusual way. Have you or would you use these words in the same way?

2. The GC2 Note for Philippians 4:19 reminds us of three things that God isn’t. Do you ever see God in these ways? How does it make you feel to know that the real God is the very opposite of these things?

3. The GC2 Note for Philippians 4:19 challenges us with a new perspective for the real God. What is it? How does it impact your heart to imagine a God like that?





Central Scripture

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

LOVING THE REAL GOD

LESSON #6: JESUS UNDERSTANDS

Key Idea

- God has experienced both the highs and lows of human existence, firsthand in the person of Jesus Christ, and He is therefore fully capable of understanding our feelings and relating to our experiences.



Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcomes: Disciples will serve His mission (M1) as they impart the gospel and their very lives in daily activities and relationships, vocation and community. They will also serve His Word (W1) as they are frequently being led by the Spirit into deeper love for the One who wrote the Word.

Supplementary Resources Available for this Lesson

www.myimpactexperience.com

www.tangle.com - Understand - Jeremy Camp

www.tangle.com - God With Us - Mercy Me

Starting the Discussion

Begin the lesson by asking the group to discuss the following question: How are God and humans alike, and how are they different? Some similarities you may wish to highlight include the facts that both God and humans will exist for all eternity in some form, that both have a capacity to love and to enter into relationships, that both are capable of communication, and that both exercise creativity.



(You may wish to make the important distinction that, while God possesses these qualities as part of His own nature, humans possess them because God put them in us when He created us in His image.) Important differences to note include the facts that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, unrestricted by the limits of time and space, and without sin, while we are none of those things. Follow up by asking the group two additional questions: Do the differences between God and humans sometimes make it difficult for you to understand and relate to Him? Do you think that these differences ever make it difficult for God to understand and relate to us? Allow a few volunteers to share their thoughts on these questions before proceeding with the rest of the lesson.

*** *Optional Activity*

You might also begin this session with this activity. Give each student two or three playing cards from a regular deck of cards. Give these instructions:

I am dealing each of you two or three playing cards. These cards represent certain life events. Life has just “dealt” you certain positive events and certain painful events. I’m going to show the list of possible events now. (For example: Ace = Your team wins the state championship. King = Your team chokes during the state championship.)

Show a list of predetermined “Life Events.” Make sure some of the events are funny and some are more serious and that there is a balanced amount of positive and painful life events. Read each item on the list aloud. When you are finished, ask the students to compare the events that “life has dealt them.”

Ask these questions: How many of you experienced all positive life events? How many of you experienced all painful life events? How many of you experienced some of each?

Explain these thoughts: We all experience a combination of painful and positive events.



Some days life deals us events that are pleasant, positive or at least not too bothersome. Other days, life deals us events that are quite painful, difficult or just irritating. We face both ups and downs. In this lesson, we are going to take a look at how helpful it can be when we realize that we are never alone in the midst of these highs and lows. The real God is with us when things are positive and when we're experiencing pain.

Engaging the Text

Read Hebrews 4:15 to the group (being sure to explain that the phrase “a High Priest” in this passage is a way of referring to Jesus) and highlight the important truth that Jesus experienced the same temptations that we face and is thus fully able to sympathize with us in our weakness. Then make the larger point that, in fact, because the real God became flesh and lived among us in the person of Jesus, He is capable of understanding and relating to all of our human experiences and emotions. We have a High Priest who is able to intercede for us because He has felt what we've felt.

Though He was God, the Bible clearly reveals that Jesus knew what it was like to be hungry (Matthew 4:2), thirsty (John 4:7; 19:28), and tired (Mark 4:38; John 4:6). During His public ministry, He experienced constant criticism from the religious leaders, was rejected by a majority of His own people, and was frequently misunderstood by even His closest followers. Then, during the last few days of His earthly life, He was betrayed by a friend, abandoned by His disciples, ridiculed by the soldiers and the crowds, and subjected to unimaginable physical torture. Worst of all, He even felt that He had been abandoned by God (Matthew 27:46).

Explain how it can be comforting for us to think about God's love and care for us, especially when we are in the midst of painful circumstances. Sometimes it can be hard to remember or experience God's care when we are going through painful life events.



It's during these hard times that it's often helpful to realize we have a Savior who is praying for us and the One who is praying for us understands our world. He's experienced the same feelings that we have. Although Jesus hasn't experienced the same set of circumstances, He has felt the same emotions. And isn't it comforting to know that we can pray to a God who has felt what we've felt and is praying on our behalf?

Considering **HIM**

Next, talk through a list of specific emotions that Christ experienced, elaborating on any passages or stories that might be especially meaningful to certain students in the room.

Just like you, Jesus has experienced:

rejection - by His own people (Luke 4:14-30, Mark 6:1-6)

abandonment - by His own disciples (Mark 14:43-50; 66-72)

misunderstanding - by His own followers (Mark 8:14-21)

ridicule - at His own trial (Matthew 27:11-14; 22-31)

betrayal - by a close friend (Matthew 26:47-50; 27:1-10)

criticism - by the religious leaders of His day (Luke 20:17-20; 22:1-6)

disappointment - by people closest to Him (Matthew 17:1-5)

a lack of acceptance - by family and friends (Matthew 13:57)

feeling unappreciated - even after meeting other's needs (Luke 17:11-9)

great loss and sadness - after losing a friend/loved one (Matthew 17:1-5)

(If time permits, you may wish to stress that Jesus was also able to enjoy positive human emotions and experiences during His time on earth—things like being loved by His parents, celebrating with family and friends at a wedding, building close friendships with people like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and receiving the affirmation of His Father at His baptism and transfiguration. Christ knows the joy of completing a job well done and of fulfilling His purpose. Jesus knows about feeling victorious and conquering incredible obstacles—and thus is able to relate to the positive parts of our lives.



However, it is likely that, for many young people, the idea that God understands and relates to their painful experiences and emotions will be most meaningful.) Close the lesson by emphasizing that, unfortunately, being followers of the real God does not guarantee that we will not face temptation, rejection, or pain—after all, Jesus Himself faced all these things. But it does mean that we need never face these things alone, and that the One who is with us in the midst of them, understands exactly what we are feeling.

Questions for Small Group Interaction



Before this lesson, would you have found it difficult to believe that God understands and relates to your emotions? Are there certain things that surprised you as we recalled all that Jesus has been through?

I was a little surprised to think about Jesus feeling _____ because ...

(For example: I was a little surprised to think about Jesus feeling unappreciated because it's hard for me to think about Jesus needing anything. I've always thought that since He was God that He didn't have needs like we do.)

2. Play one of the media elements suggested for this lesson and then ask, "Which one of Christ's experiences are you most grateful for? Or which one of Christ's experiences means the most to you right now?"



Experiencing God's Word

Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors.
Psalm 119:24

It means the most to me that Jesus experienced _____
because I ...

(For example: It means the most to me that Jesus experienced grief and the sadness of losing a loved one, because it has been a hard year since my grandmother passed away. It helps to know that Jesus understands when I pray and tell Him that some days I'm angry and some days I'm sad. I like knowing that He "gets it.")

Psalm 119:24 captures this same emotion in our hearts: Your testimonies are my delight and my counselors. It brings comfort and delight to us to know that we have a God who understands. Ask the students to pray in partners or small groups, encouraging them to meditate on the amazing truth that Jesus can relate to the emotions that they are going through. Assure them that He rejoices with them in their successes and sympathizes with them in their struggles. Invite students to express their wonder and gratitude to the One who understands them completely.



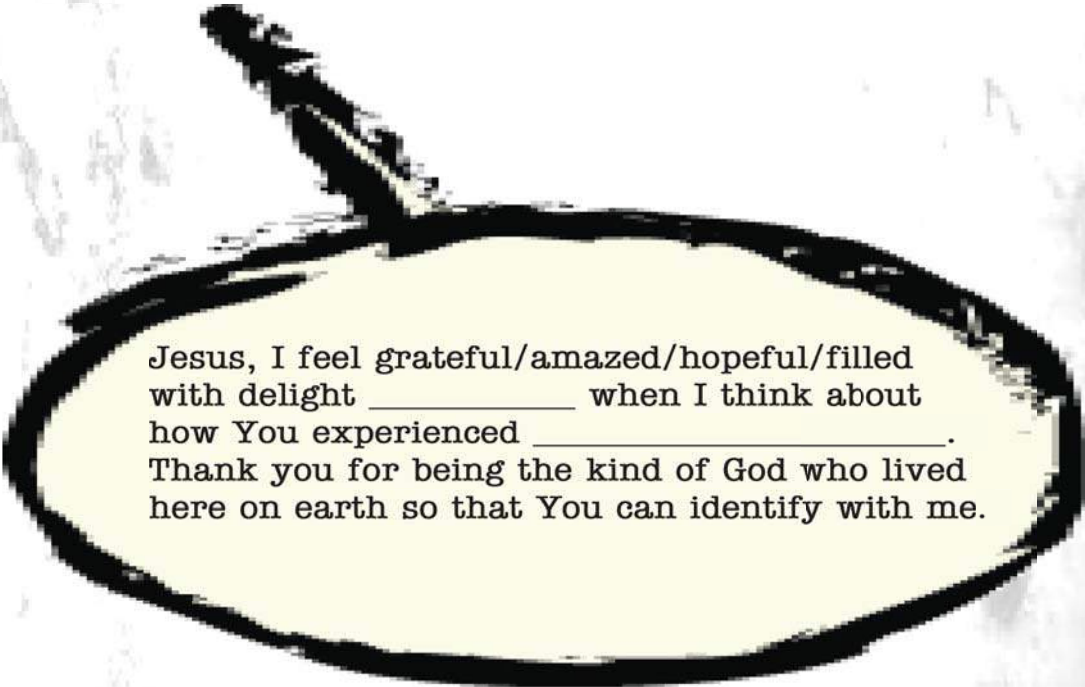
Imparting My Life

Finally, challenge students to think of others who could be encouraged by these same truths.

I think _____ might be encouraged by the truth that Jesus understands because he/she _____. I plan to tell him/her about how Jesus can relate because _____.

Closing Prayer

Prayers might sound like:



Jesus, I feel grateful/amazed/hopeful/filled with delight _____ when I think about how You experienced _____. Thank you for being the kind of God who lived here on earth so that You can identify with me.



Family Discussion Page

1. The list below describes some of Christ's painful experiences while He was here on earth. As a family, read through the list. Ask volunteers to choose specific references from the list, privately read the texts, and then summarize what they find. Your response might sound like:

Did you know that Jesus was judged and unaccepted by His own neighborhood? Matthew 13:57 tells how Jesus went to teach in His home town. Jesus gave a great sermon and all the people were surprised by how good He was. Instead of being proud of Him, the Bible says that the people were offended by Jesus. The very people who Jesus probably hoped would be glad to see Him, were the ones who didn't accept Him.

Just like you, Jesus has experienced:

rejection - by His own people (Luke 4:14-30, Mark 6:1-6)

abandonment - by His own disciples (Mark 14:43-50; 66-72)

misunderstanding - by His own followers (Mark 8:14-21)

ridicule - at His own trial (Matthew 27:11-14; 22-31)

betrayal - by a close friend (Matthew 26:47-50; 27:1-10)

criticism - by the religious leaders of His day (Luke 20:17-20; 22:1-6)

disappointment - by people closest to Him (Matthew 17:1-5)

a lack of acceptance - by family and friends (Matthew 13:57)

feeling unappreciated - even after meeting other's needs (Luke 17:11-9)

great loss and sadness - after losing a friend/loved one (Matthew 17:1-5)



2. Take time to answer the following questions as a family. Are there certain things that surprised you as you recalled all that Jesus has been through?

I was a little surprised to think about Jesus feeling _____ because ...

(For example: I was a little surprised to think about Jesus feeling unappreciated because it's hard for me to think about Jesus needing anything. I've always thought that since He was God that He didn't have needs like we do.)

3. Which of Christ's experiences are you most grateful for? Or which one of Christ's experiences means the most to you? If your family is comfortable, end this time with prayer.

It means the most to me that Jesus experienced _____ because I ...

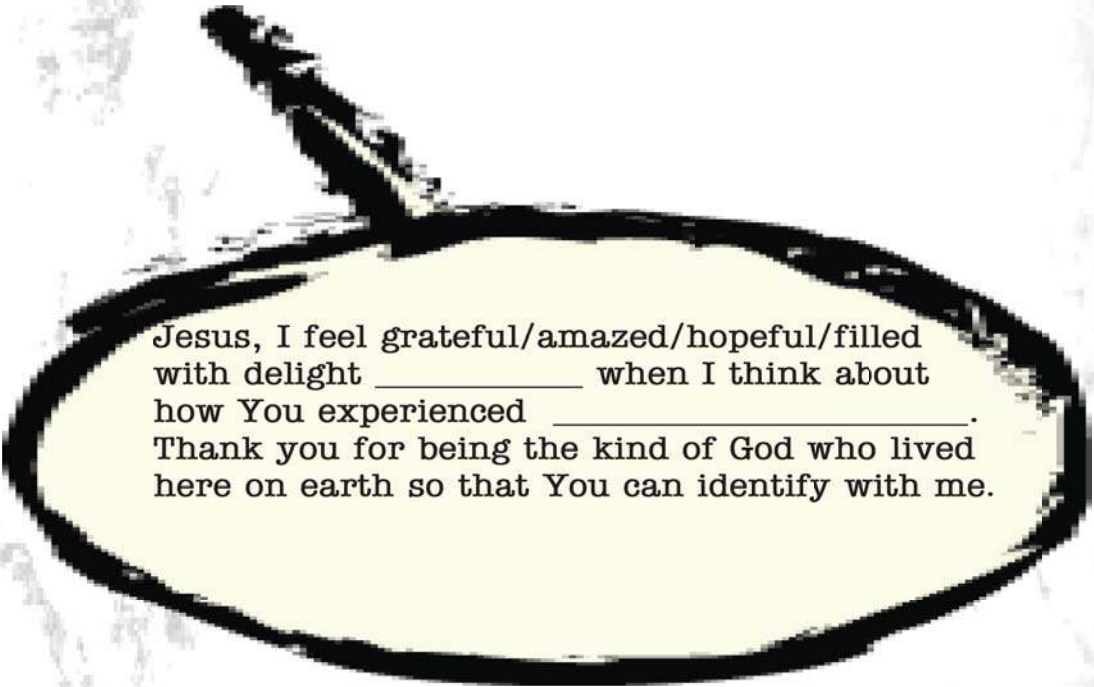
(For example: It means the most to me that Jesus experienced grief and the sadness of losing a loved one because this has been a hard year since my grandmother passed away. It helps to know that Jesus understands when I pray and tell Him that some days I'm angry and some days I'm sad. I like knowing that He "gets it.") If you feel comfortable, end this time together in prayer.

He gets it...



Closing Prayer

Prayers might sound like:



Jesus, I feel grateful/amazed/hopeful/filled
with delight _____ when I think about
how You experienced _____.
Thank you for being the kind of God who lived
here on earth so that You can identify with me.



STUDENT APPS

Suggested uses for this page:

- Use the following questions to encourage your students to read the Biblical text and the corresponding GC2 Note through out the week. Send a group text or email message to students.
- Post the following questions on your church/group website or social networking site.
- Use this page as a student handout following your group meeting.
- Encourage parents to use this page as a family discussion tool.

1. Take a look at the GC2 Note for Hebrews 4:15. Can you find one painful experience that you share with Jesus? Which of the stories confirm that Jesus really does understand you?

2. Read the GC2 Note for Hebrews 4:15. Which of Christ's positive experiences have you shared? Which one of these positive experiences is a new idea for you?

3. Read the GC2 Note for Hebrews 4:15. Find the words that confirm that Jesus not only understands us, He prays for us.

