BIBLE STUDY FOR TEEN GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN

DEFINED

Who God Says You Are

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PRISCILLA SHIRER

Priscilla Shirer is a homemade cinnamon roll baker, Bible teacher, actress, and best-selling author who didn't know she was on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list (*Fervent*) until somebody else told her. Because who has time to check lists when you are busy cleaning up after (and trying to satisfy the appetites of) three rapidly growing sons?

Priscilla is passionate about sharing God's Word with women of all ages, both the young and the young at heart. Put a Bible in her hand and a message in her heart, and you'll see why thousands meet God in powerful, personal ways through her words. She and her husband, Jerry, founded Going Beyond Ministries and count it as their privilege to serve believers across the entire spectrum of the body of Christ.

For the past twenty years, Priscilla has been in full-time ministry to women, speaking internationally and authoring more than two dozen books and Bible studies on a myriad of different biblical topics and personalities including *Discerning the Voice of God*, *Gideon*, *Jonah*, and *The Armor of God*. Now she is excited to share this most recent Bible study, *Defined*, with you.

HOW TO USE

In this book, you will find eight weeks of group sessions, seven weeks of personal study, and a leader guide. Each session consists of a group guide followed by five days of personal study. As you begin your group time, watch the video to hear from the heart of the author. There is also a leader guide included in the back of this study with some helpful tips to use during group time. As you close group time, encourage students to complete the personal days that follow the group sessions. Once girls have completed this study, they will better understand who God is and what it means to be created in His image. Then we can know exactly who we are and that we were created just the way God planned and for exactly this time.

BIBLE STUDY BOOK

Listed below are the different elements in the Bible study book.

Group Discussion

Questions and personal connections are provided to help guide the conversation.

Personal Study

Five days of personal Bible study will help reinforce the theme and provide an opportunity to study passages not covered in the group discussion.

Leader Guide

The leader guide at the back of the study provides ideas for activities and deeper group discussions.

SESSION OUTLINE

Design your group sessions to fit the space, time, and needs of your girls. The following is a sample group session outline that you can adapt.

1. Press Play

Review the material in the previous week's personal Bible study and watch the video.

2. Let's Talk

Scripture and discussion questions are provided to help foster conversation among the group.

3. Closing

Answer some final questions together and spend some time looking at the upcoming personal study days. Close the session with prayer.

A NOTE FROM PRISCILLA

At Christmas one year, my siblings and I got a Big Wheel–a brightly colored, low-slung take on a tricycle that was a kid's dream. Each of us, all under ten years of age, were thrilled. The dawn of electric scooters and hoverboards hadn't yet crested the modern-day horizon, and this mobile toy was everything.

But it took a while to get to the fun part where we could start riding it up and down the driveway of our childhood home, because the Big Wheel underneath the Christmas tree on that bright morning was not ready to ride. It was an enormous box with pieces of an unassembled Big Wheel inside, which we begged our dad to hurry up and open and get busy putting together. And he did–or at least he tried–a task we four kids didn't make any easier on him by pelting him every few minutes with our impatience. He grew frustrated and tired as he worked to fit the oddly shaped pieces together and make the large wheel up front respond to pedal strokes.

Finally, after realizing more than an hour had gone by, our mom voiced the one thing that helped get things moving in the right direction. She strode into the garage where my poor Daddy was still feverishly trying to make connections between all these various parts of the Big Wheel strewn across the floor, and said, "Honey, why don't you read the instructions?"

Makes sense. The manufacturer is the one who knows how things are supposed to fit together. The manufacturer is able to accurately identify all the pieces and put them into place, into a completed whole. And to top it off, the manufacturer even provides a manual to read so we can know how to handle his creation the way he intended.

I think you know what I'm getting at. The God who made you has given you His Word so that not only can you understand all the pieces of your identity that make you unique and special, but you can put those pieces together successfully and get out there and ride. Take this show on the road. Actually live the life He's imagined and made possible for you. He's given you the instructions that show you how.

And, hey, we all need them–black girls, brown girls, white girls, and every color of girl in between. Tall girls, short girls, athletic girls, academic girls, poor girls, even

rich girls. Straight-haired blond girls, curly-headed brunette girls. Suburban girls and inner-city girls. All of us girls–all of us women–need good instructions.

Because, listen to me, if you don't see the value in consulting the instruction manual, you'll end up with some disjointed and ill-fitting parts–things you'll still be trying to undo and refit in the later decades of your life. That's because a lot of the advice and direction you'll receive from the culture and social media and your peers–even from yourself–will be flat-out inaccurate.

- Ever-changing standards of beauty will whisper that you're *ugly*.
- A teacher who embarrasses you or a camp counselor who overlooks you will make you feel *worthless*.
- The clique that won't accept you or people who refuse to include you will communicate you're *unwanted*.
- People who laughed at you instead of affirming and celebrating you will make you feel *unloved*.
- That guy who won't look at you or who brushed you aside instead of treasuring you will communicate that you are *rejected*.
- The social media feeds that haunt you, displaying the lives of more popular, seemingly more perfect people than yourself, make you feel *invisible*.
- The tears you cry, the hurts you nurse, the wounds you bear deep inside your heart will scream that you're *broken*.
- The secret habit you indulge, again and again, hopeless that you can ever change, will continually leave you feeling *bound*.
- The coach that keeps nit-picking you, convincing you that you'll never measure up, will make you feel *inadequate*.
- That horrible mistake you made or that terrible sin you committed will sneer at you, shame you, and say you're *unforgivable*.
- The lust that you willingly gave into, or the innocence that evil stole from you, will keep whispering that you are *impure*.
- The circumstances surrounding your birth or, worse, the people who bring it up again to hurt you at your most vulnerable moments, tell you that you're a *mistake*.

These labels play on a never-ending loop in your mind, like lyrics from a song.

- "I'm a mistake."
- "I'm dirty."
- "I'm horrible."
- "I'm stupid."
- "I'm worthless."
- "I'm unloved."
- "I'm forgotten."
- "I'm unforgivable."
- "I'm unacceptable."

If you're not careful, little sister, this narrative will define your life. You'll start living down to the names that your circumstances have given you, instead of living up to the authentic narrative that God has made rightfully yours.

I want so desperately to tell you–just because you feel something, or have done something, or have been told something, or have experienced something doesn't mean you *are* something. You are only who the manufacturer says you are. He is the only One with the authority to give you your name. And because He passionately desires for you to understand this, He has spelled it out in black and white for you to read and know and believe and implement into your daily life.

Will you give me eight weeks to prove it to you? Eight weeks that could change the next eight decades of your life.

I am who God says I am.

I can do what God says I can do.

I can become exactly what

God says I can become.

I'm not defined by my feelings,

my weaknesses, or my inclinations,

and I will not devalue what He has

made me to be by comparing it

to what seems better and

brighter in someone else.

I am coming out of the lies.

I am coming into the light.

I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.

PSALM 139:14

Week One

UNIQUELY CREATED

PRESS PLAY

Use the space below to follow along and take any notes as you watch the video for Week 1.

What have you struggled to accept about yourself?

Only the _____ can define His _____ .

I will give thanks to You, for I am _____ and _____ made (Ps. 139:14, NASB).

Uniqueness and being _____ is not a liability.

How does gratitude grant you the freedom to be you?

You are who your _____ says you are.

How can you be thankful for who God has made you to be? How can you celebrate and affirm others in their differences?

As a wife, mom, daughter, aunt, writer, speaker, and resident laundry woman/homework checker/dinner fixer/bathroom cleaner–trust me, there's a lot of TV I miss. But thanks to Hulu, I was able to catch up on one particular series recently. It was already on season six in real time, which meant if I started with season one, episode one, I had T-O-N-S of new drama and story lines to watch. Hour after hour. Back to back. To back? (Should I watch another?) To back? (Maybe just one more? Maybe?) To back.

You know what I'm talking about. Grab the chips and push the play button.

The other night as I was watching a particular episode play out, it made me think of you and about this study we're starting. In one memorable scene, a woman was sitting in a counselor's office trying to get her life straightened out–which can be quite a difficult thing to do, not only in TV shows but in real life, too. The wise therapist asked her a simple, straightforward question to get the conversation going: "Are you a good mother?"[1]

What?! You could see the indignation run right down her spine. "I'm a great mother!" she answered, quickly and confidently, not hesitating for a split-second before going into all of her reasons.

The therapist raised his hand to slow her down. He asked her to close her eyes and count to ten before answering the next question. Then he calmly, methodically, asked her the exact same question again, punctuating each word this time with a dramatic pause: "Are. You. A. Good. Mother?"

This time she paused, swallowing her bravado, thinking deeply. The moment's delay allowed opportunity for her fears, anxieties, failures, and weaknesses to bubble up to the surface of her previously calloused heart. Tears began falling from her eyes as honesty did its work. You could see the question sinking in. You heard the truth finally coming out.

Time and deep thought can really bring us to a place of authenticity and vulnerability. So I've got a really simple, straightforward question for you, too:

Who are you?

Answer this question quickly and without really thinking. Just write down the first thoughts that come to your mind. (Single words and phrases. Adjectives, both negative and positive, that quickly describe you.)

When I asked this same question on Twitter, I heard things like …

Strong • Stressed • Independent • Caring • Fat
Insecure • Failure • Smart • Crazy • Depressed
Fierce • Hopeless • Introverted • Gentle • Outgoing
Hardworking • Emotional • Nerdy • Moody • Blessed
Creative • Struggling • Driven • Loving

When you've finished crafting your first response, consider this: Was it easier for you to come up with negative characteristics or positive ones? Why do you think that is?

Now, I'm going to ask you again. And this time, I want you to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and let a few moments pass while you listen to God, while you listen to your soul, while you think back on what your life has been like–the good and bad, the highs and lows, the flaws and labels, the doubts and beliefs. Ask the Lord to bring to mind some of the stuff He wants you to deal with throughout this study. Let it just bubble up naturally. And as He places words and insights and answers into your head, write down as many of them as you feel comfortable listing in your book today. (You may want to come back later and add a few more. I actually want you thinking about this question a lot. Not just now, but frequently.)

Who (dramatic pause). Are (dramatic pause). You?

Let's hear it.

Give me more.

Is that all? You sure?

It really is amazing the deeper levels you can discern by absorbing a question and pondering it a second time. Watch Jesus do this same sort of thing with His disciples in Matthew 16:13-17.

Compare Jesus' question in verse 13 with His question in verse 15. What's the difference?

Now compare their answers in verse 14 with Peter's answer in verse 16. Their first answers came largely from public opinion. Where did Jesus say Peter's answer came from? (See verse 17.)

Why do you think God might wait to reveal something to you until He has more of your attention, until you've truly invested yourself in wanting to know?

Look back at the second set of attributes you wrote down, as well as the ones you wrote at first. Where do you believe these answers of yours mostly stem from? I'll give you some choices. Check any that apply.

- ☐ **How you've always thought of yourself**
- ☐ **What other people think or say about you (family, coach, friend, etc.)**
- ☐ **Things that have happened to you in the past (both good and bad)**
- ☐ **Influences from culture (TV, social media, movies, magazines)**
- ☐ **Your own past behaviors and attitudes**
- ☐ **Christian beliefs and teaching**
- ☐ **Somewhere else: _____**

This study is all about your *identity*. Who you really are. And let me tell you, right up front here–as I said to you in the intro to this whole study–the way you *feel* is not necessarily who you *are*.

So as you look back at the things you just wrote, some of them most likely do contain elements of your true identity, yet some of them probably reflect a few distortions based on the devil's lies and his ability to convince you that you're somebody based on your past, your behaviors, or illegitimate labels placed on you by others. This struggle between a woman's God-given identity and the one she often comes to believe about herself is continuous and ongoing. So, right here at your young age, it's time to call a thing a thing and expose the strategies of the enemy to deceive you, because they're designed to steer you away from your genuine identity. And we're just not having any of that.

So as we wrap up for today, I want you to continue to consider the things you've started thinking about, and also contemplate this online definition of *identity*:

"the fact of being who or what a person or thing is."[2]

Throughout the next eight weeks, this is what you and I are going to pursue: actually being and becoming who we really are and who we were really created to be. We'll be overcoming the lies we're constantly being fed and the distortions we're struggling to stand against. We'll think through some vital aspects of identity and answer questions like…

- Why is a strong sense of your true identity important?
- What kinds of false perspectives do you carry that impact your behavior?
- Who has the authority to determine your identity?
- How can God help you redefine yourself by what He says about you?
- How can you adapt your behavior to align with what you know about the identity He's given you?
- How can you express your individuality through the lens of your God-given identity?

Because here's the thing: You'll spend your whole life either (1) trying to be and become something you were never meant to be, or (2) discovering who you've been all along and investing yourself in that sure direction. The first path is exhausting, frustrating, soul-killing. (Have you noticed?) The second path is lined with enjoyment, freedom, and fulfillment with the real, honest-to-goodness ability to be uniquely you and to reach your divinely ordained potential without being hampered by perfectionism, fear, and crippling insecurity.

Take a moment to write a definition of identity in your own words.

How is a description of someone different from their identity?

I am so honored to sit across from you here as your teacher and sister in Christ. I'm no expert, just a girl who's lived a little longer than you, made some mistakes, dusted herself off, received grace, and started over again. So we'll grow together and explore this "Who Are You?" question from lots of different biblical angles, gaining clarity on so many of the profoundly important issues that arise from it and how it impacts your relationships, choices, and behaviors. And as we do, along the way–both in these group sessions as well as privately throughout the week–I truly believe the answers we find will change the course of your entire life.

WEEK 1 • DAY 1

DESTINATIONS

I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made.
PSALM 139:14

I HAVE a gorgeous niece named Kariss. She is a super-creative, ultra-entrepreneurial young woman who runs her own photography business and creates the most incredible images for her blogs and social media feeds. She's also a computer geek who has her finger on the pulse of advancements in technology.

Kariss made an interesting observation lately. She said she can always tell if a person was born pre-2000 or afterward by whether or not they give specific driving directions. She giggles every time she hears older people try to tell each other how to get somewhere by drawing a map or by detailing step-by-step, turn-by-turn instructions. Do you ever hear your parents or grandparents or other adults do that? Probably.

But you never do that, do you? Because if you're supposed to meet a friend or find a place you've never been before, all you need is the address. Punch it into your phone, and your favorite navigational app will tell you exactly how to get there.

Well, you and I are on a journey here. We want to reach a specific location. We want to get to the place where we truly understand our identity and are living free of others' expectations and pressures. In order to get there, however, we need to put in some reliable addresses–locations we know are the right ones. Because as long as we plug in the right address, we can be sure it's going to take us to the right place.

I've placed in the margin a good address for us to start our journey. Read it slowly and prayerfully. Consider also looking it up in several different Bible translations.

Either in your Bible or in the margin, underline the words that stand out most clearly to you. Then tell me here why they caught your attention.

For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth.
PSALM 139:13-15

One of the most exciting ways to study the Bible and really understand what God wants us to see is to learn what the words meant in their original languages, and then find other Scripture addresses where those words also appear.[3] Being able to analyze how God used an identical word elsewhere, in another context, is a strategy I use all the time in my Bible study to give me a more comprehensive feel for what He means.

Let's take, for example, the word "wondrously," also translated "wonderfully." The Hebrew word that's translated "wondrously" in Psalm 139:14 actually shows up many times in the Old Testament. I'd like to draw your attention to two in particular. In each of them, God is speaking to Moses–first, as He was delivering the children of Israel from Egypt; second, as He was leading them toward the promised land.

Read Exodus 3:20 and Exodus 34:10 in the margin. Circle the one word in each verse that sounds the most like something "wondrous" or "wonderful."

Now think critically about the verses you just read:

1. **Who is accomplishing the words you circled?**

2. **What makes these tasks unique from anything a human could do?**

3. **What was meant to be the outcome of God's "miracles" in Exodus 3:20?**

4. **What was meant to be the outcome of His "wonders" in Exodus 34:10?**

If you were explaining to someone what any of these words imply and what they accomplished, what would you say?

When I stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my miracles that I will perform in it, after that, he will let you go.
EXODUS 3:20

And the Lord responded: "Look, I am making a covenant. I will perform wonders in the presence of all your people that have never been done in the whole earth or in any nation. All the people you live among will see the Lord's work, for what I am doing with you is awe-inspiring."
EXODUS 34:10

In each of these verses, the Creator planned and performed specific, extraordinary, miraculous acts that were so eye-opening and jaw-dropping that no human could duplicate them, and no one who encountered them could remain unaffected. Whether friend or foe, whether ally or enemy, everyone who saw the "miracles" and "wonders" of God on display was moved in their hearts and became clearly aware of His purposes.

And the same wonderful word that describes what God did in the Book of Exodus and the effect it had on the people who witnessed it is the same word in Psalm 139 that describes how "wondrously" He made you!

The same "wondrous" word from Psalm 139:14 is translated in a verse in Exodus as "distinguished." Look up Exodus 33:16. (Your version might say "distinct" or "separated" or "special" or "set apart.") How does this word add even more depth to your understanding of who you were made to be?

What does the "wondrous" way you were created tell you in terms of:

1. The fact that you are unique and cannot be replicated.

2. The effect of your life and testimony on other people.

You, girl, are a miracle. Your racial background, body shape, unique facial features, and hair texture are all an expression of the image of God. And even if you never hear others say it, the people who meet you–when you're being who God created you to be, not trying to be somebody you're not–are interacting with a literal, living, breathing miracle. And like all of God's miracles, your life will leave a lasting impact on them if you'll simply be yourself, surrendered to God, molded by His Spirit, and on mission for Him.

What are some of your most distinctive physical features and personality characteristics? Which of these characteristics are celebrated in your culture, and which are devalued?

What aspect of your physical body do you most struggle to enjoy?

What aspects of your personality feel more like liabilities than assets?

Explain the circumstances that have led you to feel and think this way about yourself.

My friend Kris was eighteen years old when a would-be boyfriend convinced her that she was too fat to be his date to the prom. As a result, she spent her senior year too consumed with obsessive exercise and not eating to make any enjoyable memories at all. It made her feel exhausted, frail, and on edge. Then a month before prom, despite her investment in her physical appearance, the guy asked someone else to the dance anyway. She wishes now–as a young, newly married woman in her twenties–that she could go back and tell her eighteen-year-old self the truth of Psalm 139 instead of ruining her last year of high school on the opinion of a pimply-faced boy.

Listen, whenever someone–a boy, a coach, teachers, or even a well-meaning loved one–makes you feel like you're anything less than a miracle, take back the reins and tell yourself the truth of Psalm 139, literally and out loud:

I am a miracle!

You are a demonstration of the creative genius of Almighty God, and the world is waiting to encounter the miracle of who He created you to be.

End today's lesson by writing out a short prayer of thanksgiving to God. Even if you don't feel special or you've been told you're less than miraculous, declare the truth in your prayer. Thank Him for the miracle He's created you to be.

HE SEES, HE KNOWS

LORD, you have searched me and known me.
PSALM 139:1

NO ONE KNOWS you like your Creator does. Every single quirk, uniqueness, weakness, or deficiency that your friends and family know about (and perhaps sometimes have a difficult time understanding or tolerating) is already known by God. But here's the best part: no matter what flaws you have or mistakes you may have made, He loves you just the same and intends to use every part of you as an instrument for His glory to be displayed. Every single part. Even the hard-to-accept parts. You have been intentionally designed, and you are crafted in His image.

Today, let's mine more treasures like these from Psalm 139.

I've printed a long passage in the margin of your book. These are the first six verses from Psalm 139. And, again, I want you to underline some specific words and phrases.

LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up; you understand my thoughts from far away. You observe my travels and my rest; you are aware of all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me. This wondrous knowledge is beyond

Look for any words or short statements that identify an action God takes concerning you. You should be able to find almost ten of them, depending on how narrowly you isolate things.

Craft a long run-on sentence (this isn't grammar class, okay?) that strings all these divine actions together. You might even want to turn it into a prayer, saying something like, "Lord, thank You that You …"

Let's go just a little bit further now. Considering what you underlined in the passage, what insights do they give you into God's …

- **knowledge of you?**
- **concern about you?**
- **understanding of you?**
- **interest in you?**

Who are some of the people in your life who relate to you similarly, who show concern for you and interest in you?

Search: to search out, to investigate

Observe: to scrutinize, sift, measure

Now that you've shown your work, let me show you some of mine. Two of the words that jumped out at me when I read these verses were "you have *searched* me" and "you *observe* [me]."

No one investigates or searches into something they don't care about. Nor do they observe someone in whom they take no interest. In order for our heavenly Father to be motivated enough to pay such close attention to us, He must first consider the object of His attention–*you*–extremely valuable and worthy of His detailed attention.

That's why the writer of this psalm–we believe it's King David–opened up by basically saying, sort of flabbergasted, "Why in the world would the God of the entire universe care this much about *me*?"

Can't you hear the awe in his voice, realizing not only that God could know so much about him, but also wanted to? God loved and took care of David more than even David loved and took care of himself. Do you see that? God not only possesses the capacity for having personal knowledge of you like nobody's business; He also, despite everything else on His plate today, prioritizes and desires knowing this much about you, His beloved daughter.

I'll wait here while you worship Him for that.

Here's a little extra space if you feel like writing your worship down. And I don't care how messy you get. Whether you use words or pictures, a ballpoint pen or colored pencils, scribble praises to Him all the way out into the margins.

Let's explore three important reactions that our study should elicit from us. First, I hope this whole concept of how God searches and knows you raises your awareness that He is everywhere, all around you, all the time. That's the main gist of what David said, beginning with verse 7. We need to know, really know, that God is with us. Always.

Where can I go to escape your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
PSALM 139:7

Turn to Psalm 139 in your own Bible and read verses 7-12.

Because of how deeply God sees and because of how inescapable His eye, what are some things He knows about you that no one else knows? (I realize it's a nosy question, but be honest. If you don't feel comfortable writing it here, please put it somewhere else. It's really important not to dodge it.) Think of what He, and maybe He alone, knows about your …

- **attitudes**
- **thoughts**
- **behaviors**
- **past**
- **hurts**
- **wounds**
- **fears**
- **failures**

Earlier you listed the names of people who care about you. What are some things about your private life that you wouldn't want them to know? How do you think they'd respond?

How would you respond if you found out certain things about them?

Yes, I want you to be aware and mindful–knowing–that as far as God's searchlight goes, "even the darkness is not dark to you. The night shines like the day" (v. 12). More than store surveillance, more than school security, more than cell phone cameras snapping pictures and posting them everywhere you go, you are never, ever, ever out of range of what God can see.

God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is! If I counted them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.
PSALM 139:17-18

Here, then, is the second thing. And it's very important you don't miss this if you truly want to understand your identity. The promise of God's nearness to you and His knowledge of you is primarily designed to comfort you.

To comfort you.

Look at Psalm 139:17-18 in the margin. No matter how often David may have squirmed at God's nearness and knowledge, what did his heart ultimately conclude about it?

"When I wake up, I am still with you" (v. 18). How can you use certain parts of the day (morning, lunchtime, sunset, last thing before bed, etc.) as key moments for recognizing and being grateful for God's awareness of you?

I'm sure you've felt that awful emptiness that sweeps over you when someone has found out about a part of your life you wanted to keep hidden. Maybe when they heard or discovered it, they responded to you with anger, or judgment, or rejection, or exclusion.

But God isn't like that. He isn't looking to catch you. He's looking because He loves you. He wants to help you. He wants to strengthen and encourage you. He wants to keep you from experiencing the shame and discouragement that goes along with being treated like or living like someone less than who you really are. He wants you comforted in knowing He has made you for incredible things, to be free and confident in Him, so you can actually be glad His eyes are seeing what nobody else sees. He wants you enjoying the benefits that come from living for Him, loving Him, and being exactly who He's created you to be.

Let this knowledge give you the assurance, too, that if you're in a situation where some secret things are being done to you–abuses that you've been told no one should ever know about or that no one cares about–God cares. He knows. He sees. You are not alone. Tell someone you trust, and trust that your heavenly Father has not forgotten you.

Then, one final thing before we close our day of study: an awareness of God's presence near you and His knowledge of you should convict you, the same as it convicts me. Conviction is when God's Spirit makes us feel uneasy about our sin and compels us to run from it as fast as we can. His all-encompassing camera angles should compel you and me to take seriously everything we do and think and say. We should want to honor Him because He is with us always.

His nearness *comforts* me because …

His nearness *convicts* me because …

WEEK 1 • DAY 3

THE VIEW FROM STREET LEVEL

[He] has determined their appointed times
and the boundaries of where they live.
ACTS 17:26

ONE OF the fun things about my life is getting to travel to lots of different places. A few years ago, for the first time, my husband and I were invited to visit India. We loved every minute of it. No matter how hard we tried, we couldn't seem to digest all the exotic, incredible, overwhelming things we encountered (if you're not counting the loads of fresh baked naan we devoured! Yum.).

There is one thing about our visit that I will never forget. Dotted along the roadside every few miles in India are these idol worship stations. Everywhere. At first glance, especially at night, they're pretty engaging to see. Inviting even. The glitter of brightly colored carnival lights dancing in the cool night air pinpoint their locations. They're really something.

Idols blind us to our true identity.

But here's the deal. Idols, even the fancy and most festive ones, are still idols. And idols always blind people to their true identity. They cloud our vision of the true Creator. And whether they sit inside elaborately decorated shrines on an Indian thoroughfare, or fit comfortably inside the palms of our hands under our scrolling thumbs, or take up the majority of our time and energy, or assume a voice of authority louder than the voice of God in our lives, they disorient our view of both Him and ourselves.

What's an example of an idol in your life—something, someone, or even an idea or activity—that you've given more influence and control over your life than God?

What have been some of the effects you've observed, both in yourself and your peers, by giving so much power and importance to these things?

Our experience in India comes to mind whenever I read Acts 17. It's the story of Paul the apostle traveling through Athens, Greece, in the first century and becoming "deeply distressed." Let's see why:

Look up Acts 17:16 in your Bible. What caused Paul to become saddened?

Paul noticed one thing in particular that grabbed his attention. What was it (v. 23)?

Now read on to verses 24-25. List two or three of Paul's main points in the message he shared with the people of that region.

Read the scholar's remark in the margin. How do you see this same kind of idolatry evident in our culture today? Why do you think people are still so susceptible to it? Why so hungry for it?

Paul made a clear case about God being the sole Creator, the One who "made the world and everything in it." But not only did God do the big stuff–the whole universe stuff–He also did the little stuff. The you stuff. The me stuff. Even the timing and positioning of the you and me stuff.

Do you see it there in verse 26? How He "appointed times" for groups of people to exist? How He determined the geographical "boundaries" of where we would live? How He made every "nationality"?

In other words, not only are you not an accident, but even the specific setting, the circumstances, and the timing of your existence are not accidents either. Your heavenly Father meant for you to be here–in this family dynamic, in this city, inside your ethnic background, and living in this generation at this time.

One writer says of ancient Greece, "Divinity was to be found in the heavens, in nature, in humanity. The idea of a single supreme being who stood over the world, who created all that exists, was totally foreign to them."[4]

"From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live."
ACTS 17:26

Write about each of the following aspects of your life. How do you think God may have chosen you—a biblically literate, God-fearing warrior for Christ—to exist:

- **in your skin?** _____
- **in your gender?** _____
- **in your family?** _____
- **in your school?** _____
- **in your church?** _____
- **in your city, state, and nation?** _____
- **right now—in this decade?** _____
- **in this generation?** _____

In many ways, more than some people might admit, we can all feel out of place here sometimes, despite God's insistence that He put us here on purpose. I'm thinking of women I know (and of girls I knew when I was your age) who are light-years ahead of their peers in terms of their thought processes, ideas, and creativity. People tend to misunderstand them. It often leaves them feeling stifled and suffocated, as if they don't belong here. On the flip side, I've also met women who, instead of being up on the latest trends and fashions, are more emotionally connected with days gone by. They express their nostalgic nature with their vintage clothing or their bent toward simplicity or their romantic notions of a previous century. They, too, feel out of place, overwhelmed by fast-paced expectations that seem to clash with their innate design.

The truth of Acts 17:26 can set either woman at ease; it can set you at ease. You are not a mistake. You were meant to be here–with your temperament, in your birth order, with your unique personality and physical traits–to serve the purposes of God in this age.

A young man named Jeremiah felt this dilemma. Scholars believe he wasn't yet twenty years old when God said to him, "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5).

Fill in the blanks from the four statements in that verse:

"I _____ you."

"I _____ you."

"I _____ you _____."

"I _____ you."

See Jeremiah's reaction in the margin to what God said of him–about whether Jeremiah believed God had made him exactly as He wanted him to be, exactly for the moment in history where God had placed him.

But I protested, "Oh no, Lord God! Look, I don't know how

Have you ever felt this way? If so, what made you feel inadequate to complete a task or job?

How have you allowed this sense of inadequacy to make you shrink back from being yourself?

When have you pressed on ahead anyway, confident in who God has made you to be and what He's called you to do?

Read how God responded in verse 7 to Jeremiah's denial in verse 6. How could you apply the Lord's words to a specific challenge you're facing today, in terms of feeling overlooked, out of place, misfit?

If you don't believe you can listen to what God has said in His Word about you–if you're a lot more tuned in to what you think, and what people think, and what the trends of culture seem to be saying–what your idols say–you'll almost always come to the conclusion that He made a lot of mistakes when He made you. He put you in the wrong body shape, burdened you with the wrong background, gave you the wrong skill set, entrusted you to the wrong parents, left you to deal with the wrong struggles, all within the wrong time frame.

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

You are who He made you to be, living where He wants you to be, when He wants you to be.

Chosen. Set apart. Appointed by God.

WEEK 1 • DAY 4

ROCKY ROMAN ROAD

His invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world.
ROMANS 1:20

SOME OF MY all-time favorite verses come from the book of Romans. Like these:

- "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).
- "Therefore, there is no now condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
- "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37).
- "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

But in order to get to all these life-changing passages in Romans 6–12 and to understand just how amazing the gospel truly is, we first need to go through Romans 1. And I'm telling you, it's not pretty. I still remember vividly, at age sixteen, the time when a well-known preacher visited our church and delivered a message on the second half of that chapter. It blew me away. And while I realize it's a tough, hard-hitting piece of Scripture, I know you can handle it.

We'll look at it in four quick bites. I'm going to write a portion of the passage and give you an opportunity to think through a few questions. As you read the verses, underline any key words or phrases that stand out to you. Let's go!

1. THE DANGER

For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
ROMANS 1:18

What are some of God's truths that you see ignored, denied, twisted, or suppressed in today's culture? Even in Christian culture? Check the ones you notice the most:

- ☐ **God creates each person as male or female.**
- ☐ **Sexual unity is designed for husband and wife.**
- ☐ **Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.**
- ☐ **The Bible is the true, reliable Word of God.**
- ☐ **Church is a necessary part of the Christian life.**
- ☐ **Write down anything else you can think of:** _____

What happens when people believe these truths to be lies, when we decide we want to live by another "truth"?

2. THE DESIGNER

What can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.
ROMANS 1:19-20

Here are a few examples of God's attributes that are evidenced in creation. Match the physical observation on the right with the aspect of God it might reveal. There are no wrong answers.

power	**math and science**
grandeur	**birds and birds' nests**
faithfulness	**otters and puppy dogs**
joyfulness	**sunsets and wildflowers**
infinity	**mountains and oceans**
knowledge	**stars and galaxies**
provision	**morning and evening**
beauty	**volcanoes and thunderstorms**

So according to the end of verse 20, "people are without _____" because God is revealed through what He's created.

For examples of occasions when God's wrath was revealed in the Old Testament, read about Noah and the flood (Gen. 6:5-7); Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-21); the Egyptian captivity of Israel (Ex. 7:1-5).

To ignore, undervalue, or disrespect God's creation is to ignore, undervalue, and disrespect God Himself. With this in mind, consider two questions:

1. How does the way you treat or view yourself reflect your regard for your Creator?

2. Think of some of the other young women at your school who are different from you, either in interests or race or some other distinction. How does the way you treat or view them reflect your regard for their Creator?

3. THE DISCONNECT

For though they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or show gratitude.
ROMANS 1:21

According to the above verse, what two things do we sometimes neglect to do despite our knowledge of God?

1. _____ **2.**_____

Rank the following words 1-6, with 6 being the strongest and 1 being the weakest, based on how they describe your feelings toward God's creation of you.

___ **gratitude** ___ **honor** ___ **frustration**
___ **regret** ___ **anger** ___ **joyful**

4. THE DARKNESS

"Instead, their thinking became worthless, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles."
ROMANS 1:21-23

"When Paul uses the word heart ('their senseless hearts'), he is usually referring to the most central part of a person, the hub of the soul. It refers to the thoughts, feelings, and ambitions of a person. This 'darkening' of the heart indicates mental dullness, emotional despair, and spiritual depravity."[5]

Verse 22 says they thought they were _____ , but were _____.

Underline the key components of the quote in the margin. Now think about people you know or follow on social media who are not following God. Jot down some notes to discuss with your group about the evidence you see of "darkened" hearts in the following areas:

- **How we think (mental dullness, inability to reason or think clearly).**
- **How we behave (ambitions that don't line up with God's purposes).**
- **How we feel (unhealthy emotional states, lack of internal peace).**
- **How we relate to God (idolizing of nature or simply ignoring God).**

Okay, that was good work. Heavy, though, right? But do you remember just the other day when I told you to look not only for conviction when you read the Bible but also comfort? The same thing applies here. Even in Romans 1.

Of course, it's convicting. In fact, Paul explains in this chapter the horrible results that spiral down on any society that follows the patterns you've studied today. Three times he says God "delivered them over," letting them experience the consequences of what they wanted more than they wanted Him–sexual impurity, perversions, all kinds of terrible things. Read verses 24-31 and see for yourself.

Now look at verse 32, and let the gravity of this conclusion settle into your soul. Even though people know they deserve to die when they practice these things, "they not only do them, but even applaud others who practice them."

This is serious, sister.

And so it's worth asking: Are you participating in any of the negative, harmful things you saw in your study today?

If you're not personally engaged in them, is there any way you're applauding, celebrating, or "liking" others for doing these things?

How do the manufactured images of perfection that people create for social media affect your ability to live with contentment and gratitude?

"God delivered them over to the desires of their hearts" (v. 24).
"God delivered them over to disgraceful passions" (v. 26).
"God delivered them over to a corrupt mind" (v. 28).

And yet Romans 1 is also comforting. Because if all God wanted to do was pour down wrath and judgment on us, He has every right to do it. Instead, He seeks a loving relationship with us. He doesn't want to be hidden and unknown. He has chosen to reveal Himself to us through the beauties and intricacies of what He's created.

The takeaway from Romans 1 is not "God is mean." The takeaway from Romans 1 is that God doesn't want us living out the consequences of believing a lie. He wants us safe inside the freedom of our true identity.

So take your stand–even if it means standing alone, enduring the unspoken ridicule and resentment of your peers. Walk the narrow road. Make a personal commitment to honor God, be grateful for what He's created, and live a life that pledges allegiance to a heavenly Father who deserves your devotion.

HALF DAY

CONGRATULATIONS! You've come to the final day of the first week in your study. I know your days are filled with school, household chores, extracurricular activities, and all the other balls you're juggling. That's why I want the fifth day of each week to bring you here–to an invitation for you to rest in what you've already studied and simply cement the lessons God has been teaching you in your heart.

Also, I know very well you may need a chance to catch up in your study if you've fallen behind. I do that sometimes. (Well … a lot of times.) So take this day of study to choose a portion you may not have had time to complete yet, or simply take the opportunity to gather up the most important principles the Lord impressed upon you while you studied. This is how the Lord speaks–by putting a spotlight on certain principles or declarations in Scripture. If you sensed something personal and holy about a part of this week's study, write it here. Remember it. Treasure it. It's God's word to you, sis.

Yet LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we all are the work of your hands.
ISAIAH 64:8

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you.
1 THESSALONIANS 1:4

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.
EPHESIANS 2:10

And on this first "half day," I want to give you a choice of three addresses that are each worthwhile places to go.

Choose only one of the three verses listed in the margin, and try thinking through these questions. No answers are wrong. Think freely and prayerfully.

1. How could a person who didn't know or believe this truth about God make some really bad turns in life?

2. How would most people tend to react to this obvious hierarchy of authority and supremacy of God over us?

3. What would you expect to be the biggest differences about life on earth if this statement were not true?

4. **What is the Lord saying to you personally through this verse? How do you need to align your life with its message?**

Truth matters. Even when it's difficult to accept. Even when it's difficult to understand. And the truth about you–the truth about me–is that God crafted us like a potter makes a work of art. He chose us for purposes known entirely to Himself. And He's made us capable, through His power at work inside us, to actually live a life of purity and love and worship and selfless compassion.

We can live our real identity.

We can do what God says we can do.

We can become who God says we can become.

Next week we're going to identify some of the complications that distort these beautiful truths, making them sound imposing, unfair, uncool, undesirable. But even with the trouble we cause ourselves, God never stops working with His "workmanship." He can still make this "clay" into exactly what He always had in mind.

But for now, let's close out this week in prayer.

Flip back through your pages from the last four days. Bring forward to this page some of the most inspiring, convicting, comforting things God showed you about His love for you in designing you uniquely and intentionally. Turn those thoughts and insights into a prayer—a prayer of thanksgiving.

LEADER GUIDE

WEEK 1

UNIQUELY CREATED

FOR STARTERS: Kick off your group time together by getting to know your girls and helping them get to know each other. Our time together is going to demand honest sharing and vulnerability and that begins now! Consider breaking the ice with a game of two truths and a lie or another similar get-to-know-you game. Once your group is ready to start, you can jump straight into the Week 1 video.

PRESS PLAY: Begin your time together by watching the video. Discuss any important ideas or passages that jumped out at you and take some time to answer the questions together.

LET'S TALK: Our focus for this week will be on who we are. Make sure to spend time together figuring out who we are as daughters of the King. This means getting your girls to go so much deeper than tall or short, blonde or brunette. Discovering and locking down on who we really are is going to be the launching point for this entire study.

Spend as much time as you need in this first week letting girls consider their identity. Not based on their feelings or what they've been told by parents, teachers, coaches, friends, or bullies. But based on who they really are. Based on who God says they are.

CLOSE: Wrap up your group time together in prayer. Thank God for who He has created you to be and for the plans He has to use you in this time for His purposes. Follow up with your girls throughout the week to encourage them to stick with the days of personal study.

WEEK 2

STRUGGLES AND SOLUTIONS

FOR STARTERS: Today we are going to be talking about our biggest sins and struggles. This might be difficult for some, but it is going to be a very important part of finding our true identities. In preparation of fighting our sins, set up a thumb war bracket for your girls. Award a small prize to the undefeated Thumb War Champion!

PRESS PLAY: Before you begin the Week 2 video, spend a few minutes going over the personal study from Week 1. Answer any questions and share a few take-aways from the week. Continue with the video and take notes as you follow along.

LET'S TALK: As you work through the session together, spend some extra time identifying your girls' biggest struggles on page 38. Remind girls that your group is a safe place where they can be open and honest. Consider sharing some of your own struggles first to further encourage girls to share. Make sure to bring paper for them to write out their declarations. The girls may also need some help thinking of ways they can declare war against their struggles on page 39. Accountability partners are one strong way of forming battle lines against our sins and being intentional about the environments we find ourselves in.

CLOSE: As you close this week in prayer, remind your girls that you are ready and available to meet with them at any time. Welcome them to reach out to you if they are struggling with certain sins in their lives and don't know how to move forward. We were made for community.