

5. How might teen culture change if everyone treated each other as brothers and sisters in Christ? If a boy protected your purity by holding back on his sexual urges, would you consider him backward or trustworthy? Would it weaken your relationship or strengthen it?

Chapter 5

Self-Wors

Truth #6: You weren't

I knew I was overreacting when my father triggered a panic attack at college. I was in college and trying to make the most of my time there. For most students, summer break means getting away from the campus and having fun. You can't do that when you're taking classes, because who wants to go to school during summer break? The history class I had been dreading all year long was the one I was most looking forward to. I had prided myself on my knowledge of history, and I thought I'd be an exception. I was willing to sacrifice nights out with my friends for the sake of doing well in school.

After all, my GPA was everything to me. It was my baby, the one thing I'd throw my body in front of a speeding car for in order to save it.

I needed money, and since my parents lived near campus, my dad agreed to meet me outside the fitness facility where he exercised. I'd just received bad news from my professor, news I didn't plan to share. I was too embarrassed and ashamed.

My father lit up when he saw me. He hugged me, kissed my forehead, and said he'd missed me. As he withdrew cash from his wallet, my defenses weakened, and all my emotions broke loose. The tears I'd held back since leaving history class twenty minutes earlier came out in a rush.

"Honey, what's the matter?" my father asked as I fell to pieces. I couldn't look at him. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't speak or think. The weight of disappointment in my chest was heavy. I was crushed.

My father held me as I cried. Even in my hysteria, I felt bad about the scenarios probably going through his mind as he wondered why his twenty-year-old daughter was distraught. But Dad didn't look scared. He didn't seem to dread what I might say. Whatever my problem was, I knew he'd accept it and love me the same. That assurance gave me the courage to admit my failure.

In choking sobs I said, "I...got...a...B...on...my...history test!"

I spit out the word B as if it were acid. To me, it certainly was. My history grade depended on two tests, and unless I made

a perfect score the next time, I wouldn't get my A. My father smiled, hugged me tighter, and calmed me down. He repeated what he always said in these situations: "If you tried your hardest, there's nothing you could have done differently. All you can give is your best and ask God to take it from there."

My father knew I was tough on myself, and his antidote to my self-torment was always love and grace. My mother was the same way. They never pushed me to be more, do more, and achieve more, because I didn't need that. I put enough pressure on myself, and if they'd added more, I would have cracked.

And while I laugh at this story now—especially the absurdity of me treating a B as a fatality—it also saddens me. Because what my breakdown symbolized was my out-of-whack priorities.

In short, I idolized the wrong things. While it was good that I applied myself, I wasn't using my talents to glorify God. I was using my talents to glorify *me*, Kari Kubiszyn. I was building myself up, making a self-monument. And when a stone to that monument fell, the whole structure crumbled.

Many teenage girls battle the same problem I did: perfectionism. I wanted to be the perfect girl, and some days I could fool myself into believing I came close. But really, my perfectionism was self-worship. It focused my attention on *me* instead of God. I believe I missed out on many spiritual encounters because my eyes weren't open to His presence. I struggled with insecurity and doubt because I stored my confidence in the wrong places.

Girls who self-worship aren't just those who strut around in tiaras, bragging about their greatness, their beauty, and their superiority. In some form, we're all guilty of self-worship. We all create a false idol of ourselves, breaking the first and most important commandment: "I am the LORD your God. . . . You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2–3). Take it from a girl who's been there: self-worship is a waste of time. It distracts you from the One who truly matters. Only when you step off the pedestal and let Jesus fill your heart can you enjoy true happiness.

"HE MUST BECOME GREATER; I MUST BECOME LESS."

(JOHN 3:30)

YOUR LIFE IS NOT ABOUT YOU

The word of the year in 2013 was *selfie*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* chose *selfie* as the runaway winner because use of the word rose 17,000 percent during the year.⁴ A selfie is a self-portrait taken with a smart phone or web-cam and shared on social media. I've taken selfies with family and friends, and you probably have too. Done appropriately and not overused, they can be fun.

But it's worth noting what the explosive trend of selfies reveals about our culture. In short, we're more narcissistic than ever. We've become hooked on seeking praise, attention, and validation online. Thanks to the Internet, we can find instant applause and sometimes fame. Just one picture with a lot of "likes" can get you noticed. Just one video going viral can make you an overnight sensation.

Isn't that enticing? Deep down, wouldn't most of us like to be celebrities? If you're like many teenage girls, you may have dreamed of catching your big break online, being discovered as a singer, model, dancer, actress, fashion designer, etc. Maybe you don't care *what* you get famous for as long as you're famous.

But let's think about how God views our self-promotion. What does He think about our building identities online and not through Christ? Does God love you more if you're the Internet darling and less if you're the laughingstock? Does He approve of how mean and rude people can be in the virtual world because mean and rude attract attention and make people laugh sometimes?

You know the answers. You know it's a slippery slope to base your self-esteem on the acceptance or rejection of others. You've seen how fickle people can be, loving you one minute, criticizing you the next. Yet despite this, you listen to what others say and let it get to you. While their praise goes to your head, their criticism goes to your heart.

Aren't you tired of the emotional roller coaster? Wouldn't

you like to feel good about yourself *consistently*? Wouldn't you love a healthy self-image that isn't volatile and overly sensitive to public opinion?

What you should know is this: *you weren't made to worship yourself*. You weren't made to base your identity on the world's fluctuating opinion of you or your opinion of yourself.

God designed you to find your identity in Christ. Through that relationship, you discover God. You receive extravagant love, grace, and acceptance. Even on your worst days, God loves you at full capacity. *Nothing changes His love.*

Isn't that refreshing? Aren't you relieved to know that the Father who knows you best—with all your flaws and sinfulness—also loves you best? For Him to be so taken, you must be special.

Since God is truth, He sees the truth about you. And if you want to discover that truth, learn to see yourself through His eyes. Begin by understanding three things:

a mirror to the Holy Spirit inside you. Since God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), your imperfections are seen as opportunities for His grace to shine.

Self-love focuses on your inherent worth and beauty. It understands how the negative, critical voice in your head is not the voice of God; it's the voice of Satan. When you love yourself, you find value in WHOSE you are, not WHO you are. Self-worship is derived from the world. It masquerades as self-love through thoughts like this:

I'm fabulous and amazing.

People love me and envy my life.

I'm better than most people and destined for greatness.

If I work hard, God will make my dreams come true.

When you self-worship, you look out for yourself. Others become competition and threats. You're ashamed of your imperfections and inadequacies, so you hide them. You believe if anyone knew your weak points, they'd exploit them or quit liking you.

Failure is unacceptable when you self-worship. You're happy when life is good and miserable when it isn't. You love yourself at your best, yet hate yourself at your worst.

It's easy to confuse self-love and self-worship in our culture of girl power. Both encourage you to be brave, bold, and confident. Both tell you to dream big and trust yourself because you're stronger and more capable than you think.

But one key difference between the two is *who gets credit*. Are your achievements yours alone, or is God working through

SELF-LOVE VERSUS SELF-WORSHIP

Self-love is derived from God. It is kind, gentle, and forgiving. You see yourself first and foremost as God's child, holding up

you? To find out where you fall on the self-love/self-worship spectrum, consider these questions:

- Do you put your faith in *yourself or God?*
- Are you seeking approval from the *world or God?*
- Do you consider your talents to be *naturally there or God-given?*
- When you tap your inner strength, are you tapping into *yourself or the Holy Spirit?*
- Does your life glorify *you or God?*
- Are your life blessings *earned by good deeds and moral living, or are they undeserved gifts from above?*

The fact is, you and I are helpless without God. Only by His grace can we function. What seem like basic abilities—walking, seeing, hearing—are really miracles because God has allowed them in our lives. Tomorrow we could wake up without these abilities. *There is no guarantee.*

Understanding this makes you grateful. It helps you appreciate God. Admitting dependency doesn't show weakness; it shows growth. It means you "get it."

All the good things in your life come from God—doors that open at *exactly* the right moment, people who help you through hard times, opportunities that suddenly appear. Nothing is an accident, and even in terrible circumstances, God blesses you. As you open your eyes to this truth, it becomes evident.

How you use your gifts is a choice. Are you looking to build a

personal empire or God's kingdom? When you choose God, you use your gifts to serve. You follow Christ's example of selfless love.

It's impossible to be selfish and truly happy. It's impossible to live in God's light when you distance yourself through self-worship. Whether you realize it or not, you and God are a team. Without Him, you're completely incapable.

"I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. IF YOU REMAIN IN ME AND I IN YOU, YOU WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT; APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING."

(JOHN 15:5)



GRATITUDE AND HUMILITY: KEEPING YOU IN CHECK

Remember what I said about letting the praise of others go to your head and the criticism go to your heart?

Well, let me confess: *I am guilty.* I struggle to keep a proper attitude toward myself. Although I know better, I often put too much weight in the world's opinion and too little in God's.

On one end, I beat myself up. I dwell on the mistakes I've

made or the people I've let down even after I've asked for forgiveness. I listen to the critic in my head (Satan's voice) and get so down on myself I can't see my own good. When I'm in a self-destructive mode, I have to dig deep and pray hard. Only God can pull me through.

On the other end, I get big-headed. I can let a compliment or triumph inflate my ego and fill my mind with thoughts of *me, me, me*. In my self-consumption, I forget about serving. I lose sight of the world at large because my attention is focused inward. Two things help me stay grounded: gratitude and humility. When these virtues fill my heart, I grow resilient to swinging emotions.

Gratitude isn't just for Thanksgiving; it's a habit we're called to practice year-round. There is always a reason to praise God. There is always a silver lining or something to sustain hope.

Think outside the box when expressing your thankfulness. Turn negatives into positives by replacing feelings with truth. Use God's promises as affirmation, as shown below, and write them on sticky notes you can post on your mirror when you need a quick of reference of truth:

- I may not like my reflection in the mirror right now, but I'll praise God because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).
- I may be sad because all my friends have boyfriends and I don't, but I will praise God because He has plans for my future (Jeremiah 29:11).

- I may think I'm unlovable because I've committed a horrible sin, but I'll remember no height and no depth can separate me from the love of God that is in His Son Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).
- I may hate cleaning house because my mom is sick, but I'll do it with all my heart, as if I'm working for God, not man (Colossians 3:23).
- I may be scared to stand up for the girl our entire school is badmouthing, but I will because there's no greater love than laying down your life for your friend (John 15:13).
- I may be hurt and embarrassed by the lies being spread about me, but I will trust that what man means for evil, God can use for good (Genesis 50:20).
- I may be mad at God because my father's been diagnosed with terminal cancer, but I will trust the Lord with all my heart, and lean not on my own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- I may be miserable in this rough patch, but I'll seek joy during this trial because the testing of my faith develops perseverance, and perseverance helps me mature into the image of Christ (James 1:2-4).

To be grateful, you need humility. Humility keeps you aware that you are *no better and no worse* than anyone else. It prevents you from being overly affected by events, good or bad. When you're humble, you stay off the emotional roller coaster because you live by these basic truths:

- “I am God’s child.”
- “He loves me always.”
- “Even if I lose everything, I lose nothing since I still have eternal life through Christ.”
- “I live for heaven’s rewards, not earthly rewards. No suffering or disappointment in this life can take away my hope in the afterlife.”

The opposite of humility is pride. And of all the evils, pride is the worst because it separates you from God’s virtues. Humility, on the other hand, draws you into God’s will. It helps you discover your role in the great show God is running. Being humble doesn’t make you meek or cowardly; it makes you strong and fearless. It helps you recognize who you are before God and what He created you to do.

The Creator of the universe also controls the universe. Whatever light you shine, direct the beam toward Him.

“IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.”

(MATTHEW 5:16)

YOUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

- “Even if I lose everything, I lose nothing since I still have eternal life through Christ.”
- “I live for heaven’s rewards, not earthly rewards. No suffering or disappointment in this life can take away my hope in the afterlife.”

There’s a popular phrase I often see on journals for girls. Whenever I catch it, it always makes me pause:

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

Now, I love journals, and I’m all for products that celebrate girls and encourage self-reflection. But what bothers me about *It's All About Me* is that it’s misleading and wrong.

It’s *not* all about you (or me). Yes, you’re important, but you’re not the center of the universe. And writing about yourself for three hundred pages, focusing only on *your* feelings, *your* thoughts, and *your* life . . . well, it tends to lead to self-centered thinking.

Perhaps a better journal would be: *Getting Over Myself*. You’d still write about your strengths, weaknesses, passions, and fears, but for the purpose of serving God better. In *Getting Over Myself*, you’d focus on the big picture. You’d joyfully admit your smallness in God’s master plan and reflect on finding your relevance in God’s great creation.

Discovering yourself this way for three hundred pages would cultivate selfless thinking. And selfless thinking, as surprising as this may sound, cultivates joy.

What's the Root of Your Self-Worth?

All of us have areas of life that build us up,

strong points we're known for among family and friends.

These areas, even when they're good, can become a god. Whatever distinguishes you from the crowd is easy to obsess over because it boosts your self-esteem. It may become the thing you turn to for reassurance when you're doubting yourself and need to feel better.

So I ask you: What fuels your confidence? What external factors do you base your identity on? If you lost them tomorrow, could you handle it?

External factors may include the following:

- Your appearance (always looking good, outshining other girls)
- Your performance (excelling in school, sports, the arts, etc.)
- Your relationships (dating popular boys, having the right friends)
- Your body (an enviable physique)
- Your wardrobe (the latest and greatest fashions)
- Your lifestyle (a lavish upbringing and parents who spoil you rotten)
- Your accomplishments (titles, trophies, public recognition)

Recognizing the root of your self-worth is crucial. God wants you to make Jesus the root, to find your identity in Him and value yourself because you're God's child. *That* makes you special. Nothing you do or achieve adds more worth.

But the world we live in speaks differently. According to the world, your worth is based on your external scorecard. You're encouraged to be self-focused and make mini-gods of your looks, grades, relationships, fashion, accomplishments, etc. Living this way comes with a price, however. It sets you up for despair and breakdowns when your false gods fail you.

Eventually, they all do.

Overnight your boyfriend can (and will) dump you. Your friends can (and will) disappear. Your dad can lose his job, wiping out your lavish lifestyle. Your body can be scarred in an accident, and the new exchange student from Spain can replace you as the school bombshell.

Even your talents can let you down. You may lose the championship for your volleyball team or wake up tomorrow without your gifts. Only by God's daily grace do you have them in the first place.

But if your confidence is rooted in Jesus, nothing breaks you. Your external world can collapse and you'll still be standing. By putting your faith in the right basket, you can live fearlessly. Earthly trappings hold no power over you.

Once you have *that* confidence, God can use you to move mountains.

JOY: JESUS, OTHERS, YOURSELF

Your greatest call in life is to love others.

You can achieve your wildest dreams, but if you fail to love, you've failed at life.

Love puts the needs of others first. It shows kindness and respect, not to win popularity contests, but because kindness and respect reveal God's mercy and goodness to others. It passes on the grace you've received.

Love doesn't keep score. It doesn't expect payback. It doesn't have hidden agendas or use people. Since you may use someone without realizing it, it's important to consider the *motive* behind your actions. Ask yourself, "Why am I doing this? Am I passing on God's love, or am I trying to earn favor from this person?"

It's human nature to assume our motives are all good, so ask God for clarity. Pray for help in seeing the true state of your heart. *Only when your motives are pure can you love others properly and serve God.*

We're all selfish by nature. We all put desires of our body over desires in our soul because it's an easier way to live. But when you live for the instant gratification of your body, you empty your soul. You starve yourself spiritually.

Jesus is the solution to selfishness. By putting Him first, others second, and yourself third, you align your heart with God's. Only then can you build monuments for God's kingdom that count. Only then can you be saved from the self-worship that feels good in the moment but ultimately destroys you.

"I AM NOT SAYING THIS BECAUSE I AM IN NEED, FOR I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE IN NEED, AND I KNOW WHAT IT IS TO HAVE PLENTY. I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT IN ANY AND EVERY SITUATION, WHETHER WELL FED OR HUNGRY, WHETHER LIVING IN PLENTY OR IN WANT. I CAN DO ALL THIS THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH."
(PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What idols do you put before God? What has such a hold on you that if you lost it tomorrow, you might question God's goodness?
2. Does social media affect your self-esteem? Do you ever base your self-worth on how many "likes" you get or post selfies to draw compliments?
3. Are you grateful, or do you tend to complain? What problem in your life has a silver lining you can praise God for?
4. Imagine waking up tomorrow with nothing: no friends, no family, no home, no material possessions. Could you find joy in the one thing nobody can take away, your identity in Christ?

104
105

1. What idols do you put before God? What has such a hold on you that if you lost it tomorrow, you might question God's goodness?
2. Does social media affect your self-esteem? Do you ever base your self-worth on how many "likes" you get or post selfies to draw compliments?
3. Are you grateful, or do you tend to complain? What problem in your life has a silver lining you can praise God for?
4. Imagine waking up tomorrow with nothing: no friends, no family, no home, no material possessions. Could you find joy in the one thing nobody can take away, your identity in Christ?

104
105