

Embraced *by* God

Seven Promises for Every Woman

A Bible Study by
BABBIE MASON

Leader Guide
Jenny Youngman, Contributor

ABINGDON PRESS
Nashville

EMBRACED BY GOD
Seven Promises for Every Woman Leader Guide

Babbie Mason

Copyright © 2012 by Abingdon Press

All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, P.O. Box 801, 201 Eighth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37202-0801, or e-mailed to permissions@umpublishing.org.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 978-1-4267-5440-1

Scripture quotations marked CEB are from the Common English Bible. Copyright © 2011 by the Common English Bible. All rights reserved. Used by permission. www.CommonEnglishBible.com.

Scripture quotations marked *THE MESSAGE* are from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NVC are taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“Love Song,” words and music by Babbie Mason. © 2009 Praise & Worship Works/ASCAP. Admin. by BMG Rights Management (US) LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 — 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Week 1: You Are Loved Unconditionally by God	9
Week 2: You Are Beautiful to God	15
Week 3: You Are Never Alone	21
Week 4: You Have Everything You Need in God	27
Week 5: You Have a God-given Purpose	33
Week 6: You Can Accomplish Great Things in God's Name	39
Week 7: You Are Equipped With Unique Gifts and Talents	45
Week 8: You Can Live <i>Loved</i>	51
Leader Helps	59
Group Roster	61

INTRODUCTION

Embraced by God is an eight-week Bible study designed to help you understand with greater clarity God's deep, sweet love for you and to experience this love as never before. The message is that God not only loves you . . . *you are His favorite!* He loves you as if you were the only one to love.

My eyes were opened to this profoundly new and life-changing understanding of God's love a few years ago when, in a church service I attended, I was invited to say to my neighbor, "I am God's favorite." Now, I was raised in church, a preacher's daughter turned Christian singer, songwriter, and recording artist. I've celebrated my year of jubilee—50 years of being saved and following Jesus. I've always known deep down that God loves me—and that was enough for me. But the idea that I could *ever* be God's favorite seemed to be overstepping a boundary. The thought seemed even a bit presumptuous. This motivated me to seek the truth of His word, and what I discovered is . . . *it's absolutely true!*

Jesus said, "I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just *as much as you loved me.*" (John 17:23 NCV, emphasis added). As I've pondered this verse and other passages in John 17, I have come to realize that *God truly loves me as much as He loves Jesus.* And God loves *you* just as much as He loves Jesus!

Through this study you'll lead other women in discovering that they, too, are God's favorite and are loved by God just as much as He loves Jesus. Over the next eight weeks, together you will be embraced by God's love as you explore seven promises He makes to us as His beloved daughters. Each of these promises addresses a specific area in our love relationship with the Lord:

1. You Are Loved Unconditionally by God
2. You Are Beautiful to God
3. You Are Never Alone
4. You Have Everything You Need in God
5. You Have a God-given Purpose
6. You Can Accomplish Great Things in God's Name
7. You Are Equipped With Unique Gifts and Talents

You also will consider how, with the power of Jesus Christ operating within us, we can apply these beautiful aspects of His love in our daily lives. Each week you will study and reflect on one specific promise, with a final week pulling it all together and sending you onward with the challenge to live *loved.*

About the Participant Book

Prior to your first meeting, you will need to deliver participant books to everyone in your group. They will need to complete the first week of readings *before* your first group session. For each week there are five devotional readings that begin with a Scripture verse and feature the following segments:

Think About His Love	A devotional reflection that helps you to meditate on the promise and consider how it relates to your life.
Read About His Love	A guided study of Scripture with space for recording your responses.
Pray About His Love	Prayer suggestions with a sample prayer to guide you into your own conversation with God.
Be About His Love	Questions and activities to help you put your love walk into practice.

Each daily reading can be completed in approximately 20-30 minutes. Completing these readings each week will prepare the women for the discussion and activities of the group session.

About This Leader Guide

Each week you will gather with the members of your group to watch a video and discuss what you're learning. Sharing how the truths of God's Word are changing your lives will help group members to grow in their ability to receive and share God's love, dramatically impacting every area of their lives. Try to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere in your meeting space, and make sure there is a television and DVD player with working remotes. If you wish, you may choose to provide snacks the first time and invite ladies to rotate bringing refreshments each week.

This leader guide and the DVD will be your primary tools for leading each group session. In this book you will find outlines for eight group sessions, each formatted for a 60-minute session with extended options for a 90-minute gathering (additional time with or without an additional activity). Each session plan follows this format:

Leader Preparation (Before the Session)

For your preparation prior to the group session, this section provides a Scripture focus, commentary on the key Bible story, a teaching objective, and a list of materials needed. Read this ahead of time and be prepared to share any of this information as the discussion dictates.

Warm Up to His Love (10 minutes; Extended Option 15 minutes)

Each session opens with a welcoming activity, which provides a simple get-to-know-you question intended to help participants engage in the topic and feel comfortable with one another. Extended options are provided for a 90-minute session.

After this, you will lead the women in reciting John 17:23 together, the memory verse for the study. Hiding this profound truth deep in your hearts will help you to live with the joy of knowing you are loved relentlessly and without exception or condition. The New Century Version of this verse is recommended; however, if your group prefers another translation, you may choose to memorize the verse in that translation. Next you will read aloud an opening prayer. Or, if you prefer, you may choose to pray a prayer of your own or invite different volunteers to pray each week.

Finally, this opening segment concludes with a recap of the week's readings. You may choose to read these aloud to the group, write them on a board or chart, or simply refer to them for your own personal review and preparation for group discussion.

Bask in His Love (15-20 minutes)

After you have welcomed the women, recited Scripture, and prayed together, it's time to watch the week's video segment. Be sure to direct participants to the Video Viewer Guide in the participant book, which they may complete as they watch the video.

Talk About His Love (20 minutes; Extended Option 30 minutes)

This segment provides discussion points and questions to help you facilitate group discussion. Before the session, choose the discussion points and questions you want to cover, ponder each one, and make some notes in the margins to share in your discussion time. Depending on the number of women in your group and the level of participation, you may not have time to discuss every point or question you have selected; that is OK. Let the Spirit lead and be open to where He takes the conversation. You may read the discussion points aloud or communicate them in your own words; then use the questions that follow to guide your conversation. Those questions that are highlighted in bold may be found in the participant book. For these questions, you may want to invite participants to share the answers they wrote in their books.

Be About His Love (5 minutes; Extended Option 10 minutes)

After group discussion, you will invite each woman to turn to a neighbor and discuss a particular challenge from the Be About His Love section of the weekly readings. This will encourage the women to apply what they are discovering to their daily lives and have some accountability.

Embrace His Love (5 minutes; Extended Option 10-15 minutes)

To close each session, you will play a selected music video found on the DVD and then lead a time of prayer. Encourage the women to prayerfully meditate on the lyrics or sing along. Extended options for prayer and worship are also provided.

Before You Begin

Thank you for giving your time, effort, prayers, and dedication to lead others into a deeper love relationship with the Lord. Your leadership is an invaluable investment in their lives and in God's Kingdom work.

God also has something just for *you* on this journey. Allow yourself not only to lead but also to participate fully in the experience. Even as you encourage the women in your group to give God permission to transform their thinking, open yourself to the new understandings and growth God has in store just for *you*.

Be assured that, whatever may be going on in your own life or the world around you, God's loving presence is with you and will empower you to encourage the hearts of the women in your group and guide them into His loving embrace. And as you do, you will come to realize as never before that you are deeply loved, tremendously blessed, and highly favored.



Week 1

YOU ARE LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY BY GOD

Notes



Leader Preparation (Before the Session)

Scripture Focus

"I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me."

John 17:22-23 NCV

Key Bible Story

If we want to begin our discovery of God's great and deep love for His children, we need look no further than Jesus' prayer right before His arrest. Jesus had just washed the feet of His disciples. He had shared a Passover meal with them and taught them the final things He wanted them to know before His death. After He taught them, He went to pray.

In John 17, we see Jesus praying for His disciples—for you and for me. The amazing thing about this prayer was that it was a family prayer. Jesus intercedes for His brothers and His sisters and in doing so, shows us that believers are part of the family. He prays that those who believe in and follow after Him would know the reality and the presence of God's love as He does. In fact, Jesus prays that God would confirm in the hearts of believers that we would know God loves us as much as He loved Jesus. Meditate for a moment on this truth: *God loves us just as much as He loves Jesus.*

Today, in your session you will focus on God's unconditional love for us. This truth is often hard to take in, but right here in John 17 we see that God loves us as much as He loves His own Son.

Objective

Today you'll help your group to discover the amazing, unconditional love of God as they consider that God loves them as much as He loves Jesus.

What You Will Need

- *Embraced by God* DVD and DVD player
- Bookmark-size strips of colored cardstock paper and fine-tip markers (for Be About His Love Extended Option)

Notes



Warm Up to His Love (10 minutes; Extended Option 15 minutes)

Welcome Activity

For your first session, you will want to make sure that your group has a chance to get to know one another. Go around the room and have everyone briefly introduce herself and share one area in which she hopes to grow or discover something new through your time together in the coming weeks.

Extended Option

Ask participants to think of a sweet love story they have experienced in their lives. Perhaps it was when they were in elementary school and received a playground marriage proposal, or maybe someone is living out a current day love story. Invite volunteers to share their stories.

Recite the Memory Verse

Share with the group that throughout the study you will work to memorize John 17:23 so that you can hide this encouraging truth deep in your hearts and live with the joy of knowing you are loved unconditionally by God. For ease in reciting, make sure you are memorizing the same translation. The New Century Version is printed here and in the participant book. If your group prefers another translation, you may choose to memorize the passage in that translation of the Bible.

For the first week, read the verse aloud together. You may want to write it on a marker board or flip chart.

“I will be in them and you will be in me so that they will be completely one. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me.”

John 17:23 NCV

Opening Prayer

Pray this prayer or one of your own to begin your study today:

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your unconditional love. We confess that we have a hard time understanding unconditional love, and we sure have a hard time giving it away sometimes. So, Lord, today we thank You for illuminating Your word. We are humbled that we can know the love You have for us is the same love You have for Your Son, Jesus. We are forever changed and eternally grateful. We pray in His precious name. Amen.

Weekly Reading Recap

- You are God’s favorite. The Bible is like a love letter from God to you, telling you all about God’s great, unconditional, and unstoppable love for you.
- No matter how far away from God we think we are or how far we think we have fallen, we can always start again. God will always, always wipe the slate clean when we turn to Him for a new beginning.

- In order to grow in our love relationship with God, we have to tend our hearts like soil in a garden. We also have to guard our hearts from the snares of the enemy.
- Whatever we may have heard about our worth, we matter to God. We are significant to God. God knit us together and formed us with great care.
- When you feel overlooked, ignored, or invisible, remember that God knows your name. He even knows the sound of your voice.

Notes



Bask in His Love (15-20 minutes)

Play the Week 1 video segment on the DVD. Invite participants to complete the Video Viewer Guide for Week 1 in the participant book as they watch.

Talk About His Love (20 minutes; Extended Option 30 minutes)

Discussion Points

1. Human love is temperamental, temporary, and tentative. God's love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, invincible, and never-ending.
 - What are some examples of ways that we are temperamental, temporary, and tentative with our love?
 - What are some examples of the way God's love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, invincible, and never-ending?
2. God not only has the ability to love; He is Love personified. Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 John 4:7-8.
 - What does John say about God in this passage?
 - What does the passage say about the very nature and character of God?
 - What does the passage teach us about how to live as God's beloved?
3. Ask who in the group can recite John 3:16 from memory. Say the verse aloud together. Talk together about how old you were when you learned this verse. Point out that sometimes we gloss over enormous truths such as the fact that God loves us. We hear it; we read it; we think we know it. But when we really ponder that truth, most of us struggle to fully believe it.
 - What did it feel like to write your name into the verse this week? Were you moved? Awed? Did it feel awkward or too good to be true?
 - How does reading the Bible like a love letter from God help us come to know God's love more deeply?
 - **How is your life changed because of God's love for you?** (See Day 1.)
4. It doesn't matter who you are or what your story may be. You can start again. Jesus will forgive every mistake, and He can satisfy every longing you have, if you ask Him. Everybody can use a do-over every now and then—another opportunity to get things right with the Lord.

Notes



- When have you needed a do-over?
 - How have you experienced God's grace to start again after a time of trial, temptation, or rebellion—or even just after a really bad day?
 - **What fresh start do you need to make today?** (See Day 2.)
5. A farmer knows what it's like each year to begin again. Jesus uses the art of comparison as He tells the story of the sower in Matthew 13. Invite a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.
- **What happened to the seeds on the path?** What does Jesus say about the person who hears God's Word but doesn't understand it?
 - **What happened to the seeds in the rocks?** What does Jesus say about the person who hears the Word but has a stony heart?
 - **What happened to the seeds in the thorns?** What does Jesus say about the one who hears the Word, but whose heart is filled with compromise?
 - **What happened to the seeds on the good soil?** What happens to the one who hears God's Word, understands it, and does what it says?
 - **Would you say your heart is more like the path, the rocks, the thorns, or the good soil today?** In other words, are you lacking understanding, do you have a stony heart, are you filled with compromise, or are you thriving and flourishing with Jesus?
 - **How can you till the soil of your heart so that God's work can sink in deep and grow roots that produce an abundant harvest of love, faith, joy, and life?** (See Day 3.)
6. You matter to God. God created you because He loves you, and He wants to express His great love for the world through you. Try to wrap your mind around that truth for a moment. The God of the universe created you intentionally, with a purpose and destiny in mind, so that He could love you, be loved by you, and express His love through you.
- When you imagine God loving the world through you, what comes to mind?
 - When have you felt God working in you to express His love through you?
 - How does the knowledge that God created you for a purpose inspire you to live with intention and boldness?
7. Do not confuse what others have said about you with what God says about you. And do not confuse how they feel about you with how God sees you: You are loved. You are treasured. You are accepted. You are redeemed. You are gifted. You are unequalled. You are preferred. You are blessed. You are favored.
- How can negative messages from others—or even from our own self-talk—tear us down and make us question our worth?
 - Why do we often believe the lies that the enemy tries to make us believe?
 - What can we do to refuse those negative messages and claim the promise that we matter to God—that God formed us and favors us?

8. Take some time to read God's promises of love and care for His children. Assign the following passages to volunteers: 2 Corinthians 5:17, Matthew 11:28-30, Ephesians 3:20, James 1:4, Proverbs 4:23, Galatians 6:9, Jeremiah 1:5a, Psalm 139:15-16, Ephesians 1:4-5. Discuss what each verse teaches us about God's unconditional love.
 - When we feel unnoticed, overlooked, and ignored, how can these promises keep us from feeling worthless or insignificant?
 - You are loved unconditionally by God. Name some words that come to mind when you consider God's unconditional love for you.
 - Invite each participant to complete the following statement: **"I matter to God because..."** (See Day 4.) Tell them that they will have the opportunity to talk more about this with a partner in a few minutes.
9. Living to please God is the primary reason you were born. You were created to bring God glory with your life.
 - Read aloud John 6:1-13. What was the miracle? What is your immediate reaction to the fact that the boy didn't receive recognition?
 - **What is in your "basket" that God can use?** (See Day 5.)

Notes



Be About His Love (5 minutes; Extended Option 10 minutes)

Ask everyone to turn to a neighbor to talk about a particular challenge from the Be About His Love section of the weekly readings. Say something like this: *On Day 4 you discovered that you matter to God. As you ended your daily reading, you were invited to write "I matter" statements. Talk with your partner about how easy or difficult it was to consider why you matter to God, and how that experience helped you understand more fully God's love for you and challenged you to live with purpose.*

Extended Option

Hand out bookmark-size strips of colored cardstock paper and fine-tip markers to participants. Invite them to create a bookmark that will remind them of God's promise to love them unconditionally. They may want to write their "I Matter" statements on the bookmark or list the promises from the Scriptures you discussed in your session. Encourage them to keep the bookmark in their Bible or their *Embraced by God* participant book as a reminder that they are loved unconditionally by God.

Embrace His Love (5 minutes; Extended Option 10-15 minutes)

Conclude the session with the music video "Come Thou Fount." Introduce the video by saying that God's unending blessings, favor, and love are like a flowing fountain that never ceases. Invite participants to bask in the fountain of God's love with humble hearts of gratitude and praise as they prayerfully meditate on the words of "Come Thou Fount" or join in singing along.

Notes



Play the music video (5:00 minutes). Then pray this prayer or one of your own:

Sweet heavenly Father,

We thank You for embracing us in your love today and for the way that You have moved in our hearts. Help us to accept Your unconditional love and discover that we matter so very much to You. Help us to set aside our negative self-talk and the ugly messages we have believed. As we learn to listen to Your voice, may we discover who and whose we are. We love You, Lord. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Extended Option

After showing the music video, invite the women to divide into small groups of three to four for a time of prayer. Ask them to share joys and concerns as well as highlights from their discoveries during the week and this session.

When the groups are finished praying together, close your time by reading aloud the following promises. Instruct the women to respond to each statement with the corresponding "I am..." response.

You are loved. (I am loved.)
You are treasured. (I am treasured.)
You are accepted. (I am accepted.)
You are redeemed. (I am redeemed.)
You are gifted. (I am gifted.)
You are unequalled. (I am unequalled.)
You are preferred. (I am preferred.)
You are favored. (I am favored.)
You are God's favorite. (I am God's favorite.)
You are blessed. (I am blessed.)

Amen!