**BOTTOM LINE:** Your perception determines your approach.

Down three with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth. It was now or never. I gripped the bat tight, watched the ball leave the pitcher’s hand and swung with all my might. SMACK! The ball took flight and soared through the sky. Elated, I started running the bases soaking in my greatest sports achievement to date: a walk-off grand slam in a highly contested backyard baseball game with friends.

But, my excitement soon turned into dread. CRACK! The ball went straight through Mr. Taylor’s living room window. I went from hero to a dead man in a matter of seconds. Mr. Taylor was a mythical man in our neighborhood. Many tales had been told over the years about his sour demeanor and cantankerous personality. Very few, if any of these stories, had been authenticated which only caused the legend of Mr. Taylor to grow. He was like Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster. He rarely emerged from his shuttered in home. Now, I had the task of not only retrieving our baseball, but also having to fess up to the new breeze coming from his window. A few of my friends asked if they could have my Nintendo and skateboard if I never returned.

Mustering up every ounce of courage I had, I made the long trek up the driveway and knocked on the door. I could hear the large pounding of his footsteps and the door suddenly unlock. Since I am writing this material today, you can rest assured I survived the whole ordeal. Mr. Taylor was very understanding about the broken window. He invited me in and he told me about playing stickball in the town he grew up in. Believe it or not, this encounter was the beginning of our friendship. My made up perception of him was nowhere close to reality. He was the direct opposite of the image I had constructed in my mind. I got to see a different side of Mr. Taylor that no other kid’s in the neighborhood did and it was only due to an encounter.

Our perception of others impacts our interactions with them. Until the broken window incident, how did my picture of Mr. Taylor shape our relationship? It’s simple. There wasn’t one. My perception created distance. I stayed far away to ensure I wouldn’t face his wrath. As we begin a 4-week series on the character of God, I’m reminded of my friend Mr. Taylor.
Whether we realize it or not, each one of us has some idea of God. When we hear the word “GOD,” a picture is painted in our mind. It might be someone who looks like Old Man Winter with a flowing white beard. Or perhaps they picture him as cold, distant or aloof. There are those who see God as a judge or police officer who is just waiting for them to screw up and catch them in the act.

Others perceive God as a Genie in a Bottle whose job is to grant them everything their heart desires (the perfect job, an agreeable husband, a checkbook that never bounces, ideal health and kids who will always listen). Some view him as the ultimate pushover who is all about love, forgiveness and peace. There are those who describe God as their father, provider, healer or sustainer.

Our perception of God determines our approach to Him. The way we think about God influences our relationship, or lack thereof. When you think of God, what do you picture? How would you describe Him? Don’t disregard these questions. The image we hold of God is so powerful it shapes the way we perceive the world and our place in it.

When we possess a skewed version of God built upon misunderstandings, assumptions and the disappointments we have experienced from humanity, we often react to life based off of circumstances and feelings. There is such an incredible tendency for us to define God by our own standards and we invent a god that is not a thing like the one mentioned throughout Scripture. This doesn’t cause a problem until we run into God because one cannot trust what they do not know.

The beginning of a relationship is knowing someone’s name. The same is true with God, who invites us to walk with him. In order to know God, it requires understanding his heart and his character. Yet, rather than relying our own assumptions to shape this perspective, we must allow God introduce himself to us. When someone reads the Bible and reflects on its’ content, their picture of God becomes clearer and more refined.

Understanding His heart has the ability to drastically alter and revolutionize an individual’s life. Hope lies in knowing His heart. If the health and intimacy of our walk is dependent upon the picture we hold of God then we must make sure the picture we hold is grounded in Scripture. The Bible never gives us glimpses of God’s nature and character for merely head knowledge or intellectual discussion. It reveals these things so we might revere God so we can love, trust and obey him more.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **Start your time together by filling in the blank: God is ___________. What makes you describe God in this way?**

- **How has your perception of God changed throughout the years?**

- **Read the quote from A.W. Tozer. Do you agree with Tozer’s premise? Why or why not? What makes you answer in the way that you do?**

- **Your perception of God influences the way you approach Him. How has your perception of God impacted your relationship with Him?**

- **How does one know if their perception of God is accurate?**

- **Read Psalm 9:10. What promises are found in this verse?**

- **Read Exodus 3:13-15. What did God want Moses (as well as us) to understand when God called himself “I AM WHO I AM”?**

- **In the Exodus passage, God revealed Himself to be eternal, faithful and relational. Which of these three characteristic gives you the most comfort and why?**

- **How has God introduced Himself to you? What implications does that have on your life?**