

Heart of a Woman

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24

by Laurie Aker

In Pursuit of Spirit-filled Hearts

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Prov. 4:23

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Heart of a Woman

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An important note about our lecture videos.

A wonderful benefit of the Thistlebend discipleship Bible studies is that they are structured to be flexible. We recognize that churches and individuals have different needs, and we want to serve you the best we can.

While it is not necessary to use the teaching videos as part of the study, we believe they are a very helpful and important part of the Thistlebend curriculum. The videos bring the week's content together to provide a summary, application points, and new insights on the Scripture passages.

Many women would testify that the Lord has used Laurie's teaching to impact their hearts, help them know Christ more deeply, and follow Him more fully. Through the videos they have witnessed her vulnerability and passion for God's Word and the Gospel. As iron sharpens iron, Laurie exhorts us to immerse ourselves into the Word in order to renew our minds and have our hearts transformed to become more like Jesus. Thus, we strongly recommend you consider incorporating the videos into the weekly lesson.



Welcome to a Thistlebend Discipleship Bible Study!

Thistlebend studies are designed for women who want to know Jesus more fully, love Him more deeply, and follow Him more closely by grace through faith. To use Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner's own words, "The whole aim of Thistlebend: to assist women to love Christ in the practical, nitty-gritty of everyday life." Therefore, the nature of our approach and the type of questions we ask may be different than another Bible study on the same subject. Women who have taken our studies experience authentic growth and spiritual intimacy. Real heart transformation takes place as we integrate biblical disciplines into every lesson. For example, each day we will be asked to "Take the Truth to Heart and Bring It to Life." This helpful practice trains us to believe God's Word in our hearts, apply it in our thinking, and live it out in our lives. This and other biblical practices help us cultivate hearts of righteousness as we sit daily with the Lord in our quiet time. The fruit of the righteousness of Christ is then beautifully displayed as we walk out our day-to-day lives. This is our passion and our hope: to see women grow in their love for the Lord and for others as they are equipped to walk by grace, live in the joy of the Lord, and overcome the sin in their hearts and in the world.

Many blessings in Christ,
Laurie and the Thistlebend Team

HOW THIS WORKBOOK IS ORGANIZED

- You will go through one lesson each week (8 lessons/weeks total).
- Each lesson in your workbook contains six days of homework.
- A Scripture Memory Passage is printed on the inside cover of the study for those who want to practice this discipline. Prompts are given throughout each lesson to practice the Memory Passage.
- Homework will take approximately 30 minutes each day.

Day One

- Day one in each lesson begins with a devotion that is meant to give direction for the week and to help prepare your heart and mind to receive the Lord's teaching throughout the remainder of the lesson.

Day Two

- On this day you will be introduced to the Taking the Truth to Heart steps for this particular lesson/week. You will be guided step by step each day in the process of having the Lord examine your heart. You will also learn how to observe yourself and apply the Word of God to your heart and life. For *Heart of a Woman*, this is done with the aid of a tree graphic that you will fill out each week (see Example C, page vii).

Days Three-Five

- On these days you will be asked to read Scripture and answer questions to help you think according to the Word of God and to have the Lord search your heart.
- Throughout the study, you will notice that you are often asked to copy Scripture word for word even when it's printed right before you in your Bible or on the page. Here is why: In our busy and task oriented world, we tend to spend so little time really pondering or meditating on what God has to say in the Bible. Writing out Scripture helps us to slow down and really think about what we are reading, so that it will sink deep into our hearts. Our goal is not merely to increase in knowledge but to have the Lord and His Word shape our hearts and minds.

- Each day you will go through the Taking the Truth to Heart process according to the steps outlined on Day Two of each lesson.
- You will have an opportunity to discuss the homework when your small group meets. If you're not in a group, feel free to ask questions or share answers at info@thistlebend.org. Online participants may communicate directly with their online group leader.

Day Six: Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

- This day provides a way for you to review, assimilate, and apply the truths God has revealed to you during the week.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart” section (see Example D, page v) at the end of the lesson is completed by reviewing the tree from Day Two (see Example C, page v) and filling in the information requested.
- This section should be completed before you come to class (even if you did not complete the homework from other days), so you are prepared to share your answers with your “Taking the Truth to Heart” group.

Note:

Please view or listen to the video lectures that accompany each weekly lesson on our app (Thistlebend Discipleship app >Discipleship Studies tab> Heart of a Woman) or on our website (www.thistlebend.org >Resources >Study Specific Companion Resources).

SUGGESTED STUDY SCHEDULE FOR A CHURCH OR NEIGHBORHOOD SMALL GROUP

(See page vi for the online study schedule)

Large Group Mentoring and Discipleship Time

- Begin class with praise and prayer. Then open with the mentoring and teaching time by the teaching leader. **Optional video/audio teaching resources are available** on our app (click Discipleship Studies tab) and website (click Resources/Study Specific Companion Resources).
- **Suggested Order:**
 - Week One Class: Introduction to the Study (welcome fellowship, introduction teaching, small group discussion of teaching time, icebreakers, etc.)
 - Then each participant begins in the study workbook in “Welcome” and “Lesson One” the following day.
 - Week Two Class (and following): Teaching lecture on study workbook “Lesson One” that was just completed and discuss “Lesson One” in small groups.
 - Then each participant begins “Lesson Two” in their study workbook the following day. (Continue to follow this pattern.)

Small Group Mentoring and Discipleship Time

- Following the teaching time, participants move to their small groups. The small group leader opens by reading the prayer at the beginning of the Discussion Questions (available on our app and website). The group then discusses how the Lord used the teaching lecture to speak to their hearts.
- The small group leader then discusses the week’s homework by reading the main point of the lesson from the Discussion Questions. Questions are then asked covering each day of the lesson.

- Group members are asked to fill out a Homework Accountability Card (see Exhibit A on page vii for an example) to let their leader know how much of their homework they completed that week. This is so the leader can help them keep their commitment to the Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment (see Example B, page vii) and assist them in areas where they may need help.
- The small group then together recites the Scripture memory verse(s) for that lesson.

Taking the Truth to Heart Group Time

- After discussing the teaching lecture and homework, group members move into even smaller groups (3-4 women), depending on the size of the main group.
- Each group member will have an opportunity to share from their “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” page, which is completed at the end of each lesson on Day Six. To allow time for all women to share, a time limit of three minutes is set for each person. Keeping a strict time limit helps keep the focus on God and His Word. The purpose of this time is not for women to “fix” one another but to learn to confess their sin to one another and fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith. Therefore, each group member simply reads what they have written in their workbook. The other group members record what each woman shares on their “Taking the Truth to Heart” chart (see Example D, page vii), so they can be praying specifically for one another throughout the week.
- Group members are continually encouraged to remember God’s love through the gospel as they share transparently.

What to Bring

- A Bible, the study workbook, and a pen.

SUGGESTED STUDY SCHEDULE FOR ONLINE PARTICIPANTS

Begin with Teaching Video/Audio (available online)

- Each week, schedule a day and time to watch or listen to the mentoring and teaching lecture.

Review Discussion Questions (available online)

- Pray and reflect on the teaching and note how the Lord spoke to you through it.
- Then read the main point of the lesson and answer the Discussion Questions.

Taking the Truth to Heart

- At the end of each lesson, on Day Six, complete your “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Example D, page vii).
- Share your “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” pages with your online group leader by taking a photo of your pages and sending them via email or text. The purpose of this time is to help teach women how to identify their sin and confess it.
- Your online group leader will respond to you and pray for you specifically.

If you have any questions about these steps, please contact your online group leader as soon as possible. She will be happy to help you with any questions you may have.

Example A

THISTLEBEND

HOMEWORK ACCOUNTABILITY

- I completed the homework I committed to do each day, including learning the memory verse.
- I only completed ____ days of homework.

Reason for incomplete homework:

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39

Example B

THISTLEBEND

Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment

Affirmation

The goal and focus of this discipleship study is to learn how to:
 Use the gospel by grace through faith.
 Grow more understanding of new discipleship.
 Love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, and strength and our neighbor as well.
 Live for Christ because He died for us.

Practically, this course currently pursuing the following by God's grace:
 Believing You Have Received the Spirit of Sonship
 Doing by Faith
 Offering Yourself as a Living Sacrifice
 Living as Members of One Body
 Practising Obedience
 Speaking the Truth in Love

Commitment

I commit by God's grace to follow the Lord in new discipleship, receiving the Spirit of Sonship in the body of Christ, doing well, offering myself as a living sacrifice, being as a member of one body, obeying, and speaking the truth in love. I believe that with God all things are possible.

I will submit by God's grace to God and His Word, my leaders, and to one another.

I commit by God's grace to attending both class and small group each week.

I commit by God's grace to spend a specific amount of time doing my study homework or to complete each day's lessons.

I commit by God's grace to completing my homework on a daily basis.

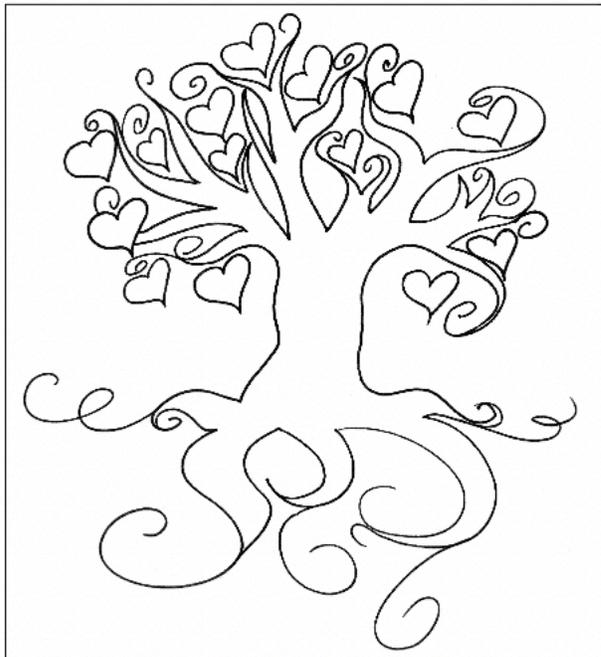
I commit by God's grace to memorizing the key Scripture passage on a weekly basis.

I make this commitment by God's grace before the Lord and my small group.

I sign this document being fully aware it is the grace of God that will enable me to remember these affirmations and keep these commitments.

Fall 2018

Example C



Example D

.....

Day Six

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

Lesson One begins the Taking the Truth to Heart process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We have been instructed to study some of our neighbor's fruit, verbal actions and words, on the tree located on the opposite page. The small group time in class will end each week with the Taking the Truth to Heart time. Each person will be asked to voluntarily and transparently share the verbal fruit from their trees, again being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." Remember, we are observing the outer man so that we can better understand the inner man. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and understanding—for eyes to see your behaviors and ears to hear your words in such a way that you are able to understand the meaning in your heart. Praise God for the great mercy and love in the amazing grace of His gospel. Keep your eyes on your Savior, the author and perfecter of your faith.

Write below three or four of your neighbor's actions or words from your tree. Please complete this before coming to class so that you are prepared to share with your Taking the Truth to Heart group.

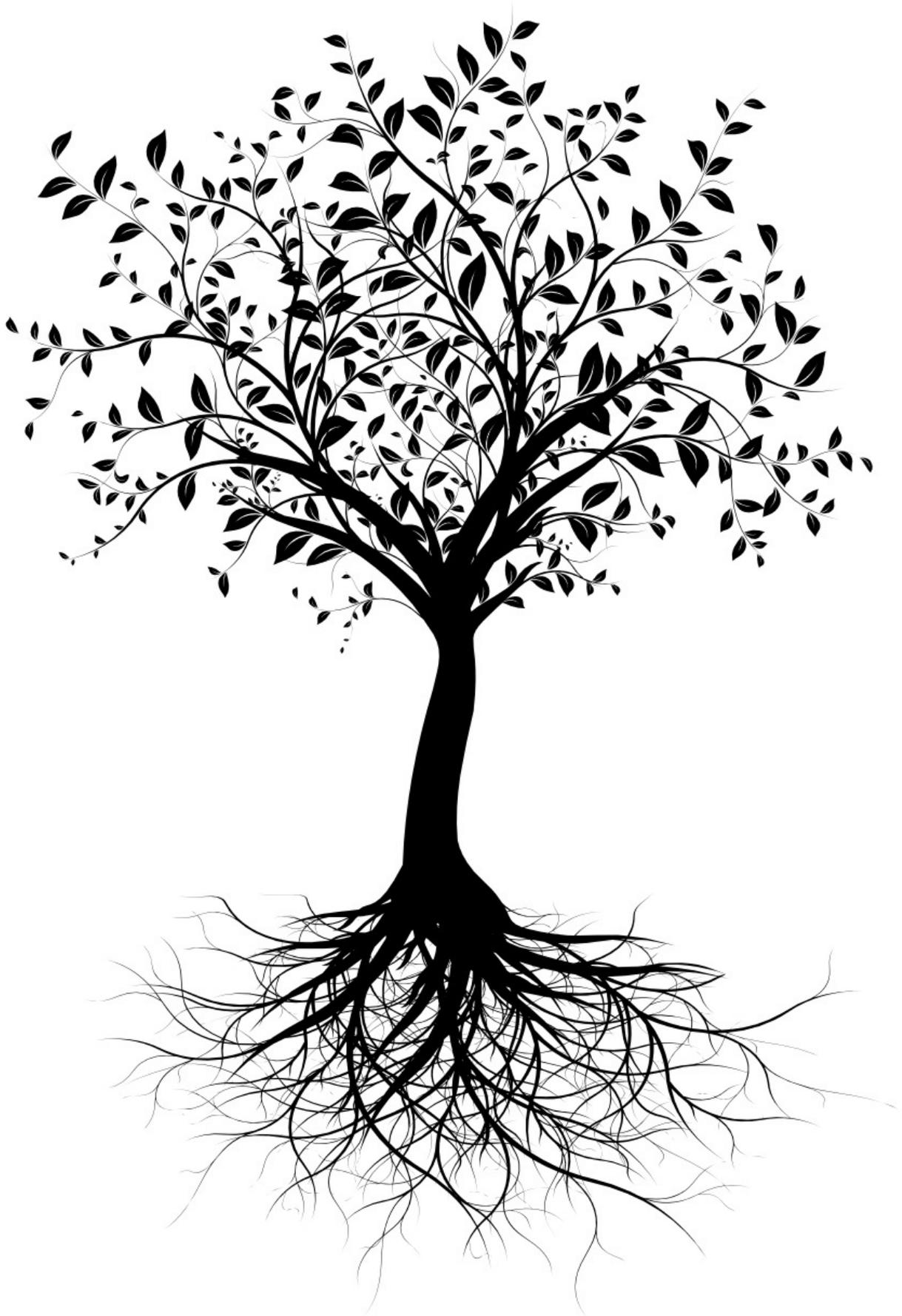
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

22

.....

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life
(Complete in your small group.)

| Name | Fruit | Thought, Feeling, or Attitude |
|------|-------|-------------------------------|
| 1. | | 1. |
| 2. | | 2. |
| 1. | | 1. |
| 2. | | 2. |
| 1. | | 1. |
| 2. | | 2. |
| 1. | | 1. |
| 2. | | 2. |



Day One

Planted by Streams
of Water

As I sit high atop Signal Mountain, it is a crisp, clear, cold winter day with the brightest of bright, blue skies. There is not a cloud in sight. I love this kind of sky. My son Noel, though, insists there must be at least a few clouds to break up the expanse of blue. But without a doubt, the endless blue sky is my favorite. Today, there is low humidity, and you can see forever. It is such a different day than yesterday.

Yesterday was a dark, rainy, and foggy day. I was heading to my daughter's home in Chattanooga and drove up the switchback road they call "the W." I was so glad that I was nearing the end of a long and challenging day of travel. The falling rain, combined with the amount of water spraying up from the freeway, made the visibility poor. Tired and anxious to reach my destination, I didn't really want to stop at the grocery store, but I needed to pick up a few treats for my granddaughter. Thankfully, there was a parking spot near the door and I was able to make it into the store without getting drenched. I found the items I was looking for in the unfamiliar store and got in the checkout line. As I reached the counter, the clerk asked, "How are you?"

"I am great, thank you. How are you?"

Her head turned suddenly, and she looked at me with surprise saying, "Really? Even when it has been such an awful, rainy day? How can you be so great on a day like today?" I said a quick, silent prayer. I responded that I had just arrived from out of town and was excited about visiting my new grandbaby, my daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. I asked her if she was having a difficult day. As she gave me my receipt, she explained she was having a difficult year and

that a lot of hard things had happened. I asked her for her name and told her that I would be praying for her. She told me her name was Penny. I was already holding up the line when I received a phone call from my daughter Hannah asking if I would please pick up some cooking oil if I hadn't already left the store. I headed back to the aisles.

Searching for the oil gave me a few more minutes to think and to pray. I wanted to tell Penny right then that it was Jesus who gave me comfort and joy in the midst of all my circumstances, no matter the weather. I wanted to tell her that it was His presence in my life and in my heart that was giving me joy, but I hesitated because I needed to gather my thoughts. I had just gone through a long trial in which I realized that my inner joy wasn't truly in Him. I had to learn how to have His joy and peace in my heart. I didn't want to sugar coat anything. I realized that if I wasn't careful, I would not be telling her the whole truth. I needed the Lord's help to share the truth in a way that would be a blessing and an encouragement to her. Yes, I needed to tell her that Jesus is the source of my joy and my strength, but I also needed to tell her that even with Jesus in my life and even as a woman who taught Bible studies, I had known some rough times not too long ago when I wasn't filled with joy. During that period, I had come to grips with the fact that there was a difference between what God's Word taught me and the reality of what was truly going on in my heart and mind.

The Bible teaches that the joy of the Lord is to be our strength (Neh. 8:10), and that we are to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4). I knew painfully well that His joy hadn't been my strength in those difficult times. The realization was harsh and disturbing. I had gone through many trials before and found myself able to walk forward in joy and know His comfort, but that had not been the case in this most recent trial. At the time, I was reeling from the shock of my response, and I desperately longed to be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season, whose leaves did not wither (Ps. 1:3). But that just wasn't the case. I was forced to reexamine my heart, my thoughts, my priorities, and my affections. What was it that I held so dear? I thought I knew my Savior's love for me. I thought He was my all in all. But I was finding out He wasn't. We think we understand the affections of our hearts, but only the Lord truly knows. In the midst of the trial, I

felt as though my life was flashing before me. I was straining to see what I truly stood upon. What was I holding near and dear in my heart? Where did I place my trust? I discovered there were things hidden in my heart—fear, doubt, and hurt—and I was unaware of them. Oh, what pain they caused.

I needed to think through how I might share all of this with Penny. As I found the oil and made my way back to her register, I determined that I would pray and ask the Lord how to reach out to her in the most effective way. As I paid for my item, I shared with Penny that I had encountered some pretty tough times recently as well, and I told her that I would be praying for her. I planned to touch base with Penny before I left Signal Mountain.

We want to learn how to be filled with the Spirit with our hearts full of joy and peace in the midst of the challenges of everyday life. During this study we hope to discover where and when we haven't been doing this. Our heart's desire is to walk in the Spirit, so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh. If we are in Christ, He has forever changed us, giving us new hearts that can overcome sin and know joy even in the most difficult circumstances! He has given us the desire for righteousness, holiness, and truth. He has rescued us, cleansed us, and paid for our sin in full by His blood. Not only has the penalty of our sin been paid for, but He has also given us the power to overcome sin and the hope of living in heaven one day without the presence of sin. God has also given us the Holy Spirit—God himself—as the Father's inheritance. The Holy Spirit, our divine Helper, gives us the power to put sin to death and empowers us to walk forward in righteousness. As if that weren't enough, He has given us access to the throne room of God, always and forever, to ask for and bring before Him anything and everything. *"How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways"* (Rom. 11:33). In view of all these precious spiritual blessings, may we do everything we can then to embrace these truths by faith for God's glory and our joy. *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace"* (Rom. 6:12-14).

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts all of us who know God and who are called by Him to get our priorities right, to prepare our minds for action, and to set our hope fully on Jesus (1 Pet. 1:13). Since He has redeemed, rescued, and given us a new hope, we need to be ready to serve the Lord and to focus! *“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’”* (1 Pet. 1:13-16). This is what Peter says we are to strive for, yet we find ourselves holding on to, or in some cases, running after worthless things. Pulled by our human emotions and desires, discouraged by our weaknesses, and tainted by sin, many of us are easily distracted and diverted away from the pursuit of holiness. On the other hand, some of us may find ourselves caught up in getting all the externals right. Oh, yes, we have been redeemed, bought by the blood of Christ, but we must overcome our wily flesh that sin has infected by the power of the Holy Spirit. I say “wily” because our flesh is beguiling and crafty, although some of us may not appear as wily as others.

The Lord has called us to overcome our remaining sin. But because we are not able to do this in our own strength we must trust in the power He has given us in the Holy Spirit and the grace and forgiveness given to us through Christ. This work will be a battle. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other . . . ”* (Gal. 5:17). In every believer’s heart, there is a constant struggle between the old man and the new. We can be blind to the old man that so fiercely resists the truth as he creeps up from behind, seeking to rule and reign. Listen to John Owen’s perspective:

Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and against every degree we grow to. Let not that man [or woman] think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in his way takes no steps towards his journey’s end. He who finds not opposition from it, and who sets

not himself in every particular to its mortification, is at peace with it, not dying to it.¹

We need to ask God to give us eyes to see our sinful ways so that we can recognize sin, identify the root of it, and overcome it. Paul instructs and informs us in Ephesians 4:21-24 that *“you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* We want to turn toward God, draw near to Him, and have Him search our hearts. We want to be rooted and established in Christ, filled with Christ, and overflowing with Christ—not ourselves! If we want to walk in the Spirit and not live out the desires of the flesh, we have work to do. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Phil. 2:12-13). We must be about the work the Lord has called us to do, the working out of our salvation. Paul further says that since we have put off the old woman, we now must put off our old ways.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Eph. 4:25-28)

Like weeds in a garden, if we don't dig up the roots of sin in our hearts and put them to death, they will overtake our hearts and choke the life right out of us. The fleshly roots of our hearts wrap themselves around and cling to the most insidious, distasteful, and worthless things, allowing the weeds of sin to sprout in our hearts. However, if we put the roots of the flesh to death and cultivate the roots of Christ and His righteousness, a color-filled, fragrant, and

and abundant life will begin to blossom and flourish. We will be rooted and established in Love himself.

So, this is what we're going to be doing over the next several weeks: getting to the root of our sin by allowing the Lord to search us and reveal to us what lies deep in our hearts. Psalm 139:23-24 says, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" Then, by His grace, as we take up our cross, die to self, and confess and repent of our sins, a powerful, life-changing work will be accomplished in us. We will impact generations.

Over the coming weeks, please remember that getting to the root of your sins is a lifelong process. When we are in Christ, the Father sees us through Him. We are precious in His sight, and He adores us with a love that is hard to comprehend. Will you make it your goal to choose to believe that He loves you right where you are—imperfect, sinful, but distinctly His? He loves you not because of your performance, but because of your position in Christ. Be patient and allow Him to lead and do His work, His way.

There are times when the Lord will deliver us from strongholds of sin immediately. However, much of the time, God works slowly and deliberately. His desire is to have a close, intimate relationship with us, and he achieves this by making us dependent upon Him. He is looking for your trust and obedience, not your immediate and instantaneous perfection. His Son is perfect and has already fulfilled all of the requirements of the law for us. Christ is our righteousness and because He is at work in us, we are able to work out our salvation along with Him. It is all part of His wise and more than wonderful plan. He is building a new kingdom in your heart. Breaking down the old and replacing it with the new is only possible through the mercy, power, and grace of God. It involves crying out to the Lord and listening to Him. We want to learn to ask God for all we need. Look to Him and plead. Listen to King Solomon's request in the face of a huge task, hear God's response, and take it to heart:

*Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father
... At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night,*

and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (1 Kgs. 3:3-14)

Respond to the Lord's work in your life and ask Him to give you wisdom as He gave it to Solomon. As you begin this process and as the Lord reveals your sin, you may feel more than a little overwhelmed by the sense of your unholiness. Do not be discouraged; although it may feel awful, it is a good thing. It is a wonderful and beautiful work you are doing, and it will impact generations to come. Each time you see your sin, remember to look to Jesus, your Savior and your Lord, hide yourself in Him, and put all your hope in Christ and not in self.

Remember, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Remember your salvation and God's great love for you. He loves you and loved you while you were yet a sinner. If you have surrendered your life to Him, it is important to remember your position in Him. You are no longer who

you once were; you are now in Christ. Happy is the one who has been rescued, revived, and redeemed! You are free from the burden of sin and condemnation. Listen to the psalmist, *“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit”* (Ps. 32:1-2). When you feel particularly discouraged and want to give up, run into the arms of your Savior and Lord. *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe”* (Pro. 18:10). Practice fixing your eyes upon Him, putting your trust in Him and in His mercy and grace. Walk forward in Him. This endeavor is well worth your effort because a great harvest lies ahead.

As you end your study today, close in prayer using the prayer on the following page and spend a moment in praise using the suggested praise hymn.

A PRAYER OF INTENT

Father, our hearts are full when we consider the way that you have loved us in Jesus. Not one of your promises has failed. You set Israel free from their bondage to Egypt, but you have set us free from our bondage to sin. We are no longer enslaved to the enemy that once dominated us. You have rescued and delivered us in mercy.

Father, the only fitting response to your mercy is that we would love you with all of our heart, all of our soul, and all of our might. You have not only called us to obey you, but to obey you because we love you. And, yet, our love for you often grows cold. Even though you have freed us from sin's penalty and even sin's power, we still wrestle daily with the indwelling presence of sin. It affects not just what we do and say, but what we think, what motivates us, what we love.

Father, forgive us for our complacency. Forgive us for being apathetic about your Word. Perhaps one of our greatest sins is that we have not prized your Word. Forgive us for neglecting the great duty of prayer, both for ourselves and for others. Forgive us for hearts that burn brightly for things of earth, while only flickering in love for you. It's not that our affections are weak, but that they are strong toward other things rather than you. We're complacent toward you, because we love other things, and we love ourselves.

We've loved money and financial stability more than you. We've set our hearts on our family security more than Jesus and His gospel. We've loved approval and affirmation from others and thought little of the only approval that ultimately matters. We've loved success and achievement, and so we've given our time and energy toward those things and little toward your kingdom purposes. We've prioritized things that will fade away, and we've marginalized what is eternal. We've received gift after gift from your hand, and then we've actually treasured your gifts rather than treasuring you, the Giver.

Father, forgive us for the misplaced love of our hearts. We realize that we are desperate for the righteousness of another. We praise you that we find it in the perfect life of righteousness of our Lord Jesus. While He walked the earth, He never once wavered in wholehearted love for you. He loved perfectly and obeyed flawlessly. His love was never tainted by sin and selfishness. And because Jesus died in our place and rose again, you have counted those of us who trust in you as righteous as He. And so, we ask that you forgive our lack of love for Jesus' sake because of His work for us.

We ask that your Spirit would fan the fire of love for you in our hearts. Please don't let us be content with surface level repentance. Let it be deep and let it be real. May we utilize every personal and corporate means of grace at our disposal to love you more. And may our love for you produce a passion to make disciples and proclaim your gospel around this city and around the world. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.²

NOT IN ME

By Eric Schumacher & David L. Ward

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No list of sins I have not done,
No list of virtues I pursue,
No list of those I am not like,
Can earn myself a place with You.

O God! Be merciful to me—
I am a sinner through and through!
My only hope of righteousness
Is not in me, but only You.

No humble dress, no fervent prayer,
No lifted hands, no tearful song,
No recitation of the truth
Can justify a single wrong.

My righteousness is Jesus' life,
My debt was paid by Jesus' death,
My weary load was borne by Him
And he alone can give me rest.

No separation from the world,
No work I do, no gift I give,
Can cleanse my conscience, cleanse my hands;
I cannot cause my soul to live.

But Jesus died and rose again—
The pow'r of death is overthrown!
My God is merciful to me
And merciful in Christ alone.

My righteousness is Jesus' life,
My debt was paid by Jesus' death,
My weary load was borne by Him
And he alone can give me rest.

Day Two



Blessed!

Psalm 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

*2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away, through my groaning all day long.

*4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*

5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

6 Therefore let everyone who is godly

*offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.*

*7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

*9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*

*10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.*

*11 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Read Psalm 32. Note your observations below.

Listen to the encouragement from the psalmist. Happy are those whose who have had their transgressions forgiven and their sins covered. God, in His great love, mercy, and grace, made provision for our sin through His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, died in our place, and rose from the dead. He took all of our sin upon Himself, paid the penalty we owed, and bore the wrath of God that we deserved. Every morning when we wake up we can lift our hearts to the Lord and be filled with deep gratitude for His extraordinary love for us in our salvation. Our burden of sin and guilt has been lifted and the bondage of sin has been broken! We may not always feel this way. In fact, we may feel overwhelmed by our sin and weaknesses, but we can learn from this psalm. We can speak the truth of the gospel to our hearts and choose to believe and be glad!

David is the psalmist who wrote this psalm. Once a shepherd boy and then anointed king by God, David is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. Because of David's whole hearted pursuit after God, it is helpful to carefully observe his psalms. In his psalms we are also able to observe David's understanding of God, his response to God and His Word, and his relationship with God. In this study we will have an opportunity to learn from David, and other psalmists, how to enter into an intimate relationship with the Lord.

For years, I longed for a mentor, someone who would teach me how to walk with God and have an intimate relationship with Him. Surprisingly, the Lord didn't bring a living person into my life, but led me to sit under David, who lived thousands of years ago. It was through him that I learned how to have an intimate relationship with God and how my heart should respond to Him. I resolved to pray the Scriptures at every opportunity, to listen and learn, and to not be afraid.

Let's use Psalm 32 as a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for God's loving provision for us in Christ. Write your prayer below.

Before we proceed, it will be helpful to read Psalm 139. It will set the context for why and how we use the Taking the Truth to Heart method.

Read Psalm 139. Observe God's love, knowledge, and care for you. Write your observations below.

Read verses 23 and 24 again. David asks the Lord to probe deep into his heart. David was well-acquainted with trials, yet he asked to be tested because he desired to have a heart like God's. We are going follow David's example and ask the Lord to search our hearts. "Let us aim to make diligent progress in the way of the Lord, and let us not lose heart if we have only a little to show for it. . . . Only let us fix our gaze clearly and directly on the goal."⁴

This week and every week during this portion of your study, we are going to pray Psalm 139:23-24 and make it the cry of our hearts. Notice that the psalmist is asking God to search his heart. He not only asks Him to search his heart, but he also bravely asks God to try him! He is asking the Lord to bring trials and tests into his life to reveal the reality of his heart.

Why would we ever want the Lord to bring a trial or a test? Why is all of this so important? Because we want to be holy! No longer do we want to be controlled by our sinful flesh, we want to be Spirit-filled! So, we take the time to observe ourselves and think through these things. The Bible tells us we are to be transformed. How are we to accomplish this? We must renew our hearts and minds by taking the truth to heart so that by God's grace we may be transformed and made to be more like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

We are exhorted not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing we may discern God's will.

Ephesians 4:22-24 says, "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Turn to the following page and begin working through the Taking the Truth to Heart steps.

Taking the Truth to Heart

Psalm 139:23-24

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

David asked the Lord to probe deep into his heart. David was well-acquainted with trials, yet he asked to be tested because he desired to have a heart like God's. Every week during this study, we are going to follow his example and pray Psalm 139:23-24 to make it the cry of our hearts.

Before we begin, turn to pages 16-18 of the Appendix and read through the Scriptures. After you have finished, take a moment to look at the sample trees in the Appendix. These pages will be referenced frequently throughout the study to give you examples and additional information.

Step One

Read Psalm 139:23-24. Ask the Lord to search you and test you today and throughout the week to reveal any ungodly way in you. We know the Lord is the Shepherd of our hearts who is tender, loving, and trustworthy. He loves you.

Step Two

Ask the Lord to help you observe your actions and your words i.e., your fruit. Now and each day this week, fill in the hearts (the fruit) of the tree, on the opposite page with any ungodly actions and words you observe (see p. A4). At this point in time, don't write down your thoughts or your feelings. Strictly focus on your outward, observable behaviors and spoken words (see pp. A5-A7). On class day, during your small group "Taking the Truth to Heart" time, each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share three to four of the sinful fruits on their trees. As you do this, always be mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. James 5:16 says, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*



Day Three



Blessed Is the Woman Who . . .

Psalm 1:1-3 *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

Read the passage above. Now read the entire psalm in your Bible. On the facing page, write the answers to the following questions one at a time. What does this passage say the blessed man does not do? What does he do? What would this look like in practice? What are the results of the actions of the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord? Ask the Lord to help you be like the tree planted by streams of water, bearing its fruit in season by walking with God, standing in the Word, and sitting at His feet.

Taking the Truth to Heart

What sins has the Lord brought to your attention so far this week? Write out your answers on the following page. Don't be afraid. As He reveals your sin, He will forgive that sin, so bring it before Him. Follow the instructions from the Taking the Truth to Heart section from Day Two and refer to the examples in the Appendix. Take a moment to fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Day Four



The Lord Is Your Shepherd

Psalm 23:1-4 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Read the passage above. Now open your Bible and read through all of Psalm 23. As we walk through the next several weeks, keep this precious psalm in mind. Take a few moments now to write out on the facing page what this psalm says about your loving and caring Shepherd, so that when you are working through difficult things in the coming weeks, you will have these truths hidden in your heart and believe them. Pray and thank the Lord for His love and care for you.

Taking the Truth to Heart

Jesus is a tender, loving Shepherd. Allow Him to minister to your heart as He leads you on a path that will bring about righteousness in your life. Again, follow the instructions from the Taking the Truth to Heart. Then, fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Day Five



O Lord, Teach Me Your Ways

Psalm 25:1-5 *To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. 3 Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. 5 Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.*

Read the passage above. What do you learn from these verses? What is the psalmist asking of God? Write out your answers on the following page. Now, open your Bible and read through the rest of Psalm 25. Make a list on the facing page of what you learned about God and about the one who trusts in the Lord. As you close in prayer today, make this psalm your prayer. Pour out your heart to the Lord and ask Him to teach you and lead you.

Taking the Truth to Heart

As you do your part of asking God to search your heart, agree with God about your sin and confess it to Him. God will do the work that only He can do. He will transform your heart. He will teach you His ways and His paths. Turn again to the Taking the Truth to Heart section and follow the instructions. Prayerfully fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Day Six



Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

Day Two began the Taking the Truth to Heart process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We have been instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits-sinful actions and/or words-on the tree located on the opposite page. The small group time in class will end each week with the Taking the Truth to Heart pages. Each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share the sinful fruit from their trees, again, being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

James 5:16 says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”* Remember, we are observing the outer man so that we can better understand the inner man. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and understanding, for eyes to see your behaviors and ears to hear your words in such a way that you are able to understand the remaining sin in your heart. Praise God for His great mercy and take in the amazing grace of His gospel. Keep your eyes on your Savior, the author and perfecter of your faith.

Write below three or four of your unrighteous actions or words from your tree. Please complete this before coming to class so that you are prepared to share with your Taking the Truth to Heart group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

(Complete in your small group.)

| Name | Fruit | Fruit | Fruit |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
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