



Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

Focus Scripture: Psalm 63

by Laurie Aker

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study



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**The passwords for the companion audio/video resources
are located on the last page of this study.**

An important note about our lecture audios and videos

The wonderful benefit of a Thistlebend discipleship Bible study is the structured flexibility. Thistlebend recognizes that churches and individuals have different needs. While it is not necessary to incorporate the teaching audio or video as part of the weekly lesson, it is a vital tool and important part of the Thistlebend curriculum. The audio or video lecture synthesizes the weekly content to provide a summary, application points, and new scriptural insights.

Many women testify how the Lord uses Laurie's teaching to impact their hearts, know Christ more deeply, and fully follow Him. The audio and video lectures provide witness to her vulnerability and encourage a zealous passion for God's Word, and the gospel. As iron sharpens iron, Laurie exhorts women to immerse themselves into the Word of God, renew their minds, and be transformed to become more like Christ. Therefore, Thistlebend strongly recommends incorporating the video or teaching into the weekly lesson.



Welcome to a Thistlebend Discipleship Study

*What is more important than our
relationship with the Lord?*

Thistlebend studies are designed for women who want to know Jesus more fully, love Him more deeply, and follow Him more closely. In Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner's words, "*The whole aim of Thistlebend: to assist women to love Christ in the practical, nitty-gritty of everyday life.*" Therefore, the nature of the approach and the type of questions Thistlebend studies ask may differ from other Bible studies on the same subject. Nevertheless, women who participate in Thistlebend studies often share they experience authentic growth and spiritual intimacy.

Real and lasting heart transformation takes place by God's grace. We integrate Biblical disciplines into every Thistlebend daily lesson where we ask women to "Take the Truth to Heart and Bring It to Life." These practices train women to *believe* God's Word in their hearts, *apply* it in their thinking, and *live it out* in their lives. Our deepest desire is to see women cultivate hearts of righteousness, grow in their love for God and others, be equipped to overcome sin, walk by grace, live in the joy of the Lord, and glorify Him.

Many blessings in Christ,

Laurie and the Thistlebend Team

Are you ready for a fresh encounter with the Lord and His Word?

Find a quiet cozy corner to meet with God in His Word, pour yourself a cup of coffee, light a candle, and open your Bible. This workbook is your traveling companion on an exciting journey with the Lord. There is plenty of room to journal your thoughts and prayers, lecture note space for notes during each week's teaching session, and a spiral binding for ease of use. If you need anything or have any questions please email us at info@thistlebend.org.

Organization of the Workbook

- Complete one lesson each week.
- Each lesson contains six days of homework.
- A Scripture Memory Passage is located on the first page of the study for those who desire to practice this discipline. Prompts are given throughout each lesson as a reminder to practice the Memory Passage.

Day One

- Day One of each lesson begins with a devotional to provide direction for the week while preparing your heart and mind to receive the Lord's teaching throughout the remainder of the lesson.

Days Two through Five

- On Days Two through Five, you will 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, we will ask you to copy Scripture, word for word even when it is printed in your Bible or on the page. 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 you to slow down and process what you are reading so it will sink deep into your heart. We aim to help you increase your knowledge and have the Lord and His Word shape our hearts and minds.
- Each day, you will be prompted to work through the "Taking the Truth to Heart" process.
- *Note:* You may have questions while working through your daily homework you may have questions. There is an opportunity to discuss homework when your small group meets. However, Thistlebend encourages you to contact your Abigail or your small group leader any time during the week for help. If you are not in a group, feel free to ask questions 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 and Bringing It to Life” section (see Exhibit C, page vii) is completed by reviewing the “Taking the Truth to Heart” boxes from days Two through Five and completing the requested information. You must complete this section before you come to class (even if you did not complete the homework from other days). Be prepared to share your answers with your “Taking the Truth to Heart” group.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart Guide”(see Exhibit D, page vii) is on the last page of each lesson. We will use this guide during the small group time to write out what each person shares so you can be praying for each other. Leave the guide blank until class time.

Daily Homework Time Options

- Choose the amount of time appropriate for your walk with the Lord. We encourage you to seek Him and His guidance as you make this choice.

Option 1: 15-20 minutes

Option 2: 20-30 minutes

Option 3: 30-45 minutes

Option 4: Complete the lesson regardless of the time it takes.

Important Note: Keep in mind, you may not be able to complete the day’s homework in your allotted time choice. When you begin your homework the following day, start with the next day’s lesson. Do not try to finish the previous day’s work. Your goal is to set a consistent Bible study pattern and trust the Lord with what is left undone. Regardless, ensure you leave enough time to complete the first two pages of the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section on Day Six.

Please view the video lectures or listen to the audio that accompany each weekly lesson on the app (Thistlebend Discipleship app/Discipleship Studies/Study Specific Name) or on our website, ([www.thistlebend.org/Resources/Study Specific Companion Resources](http://www.thistlebend.org/Resources/Study%20Specific%20Companion%20Resources)).

You can find the lecture passwords on the last page of this workbook.

Church and Neighborhood Small Group Suggested Study Schedule

(Note: You can find the online study schedule is in the following section.)

Weekly Gatherings:

Large Group Discipleship Time

Small Group Discipleship Time

Taking the Truth to Heart Group Time

Large Group Discipleship Time

- Begin class with praise and prayer. Open with a teaching time by the group leader or watch Laurie's teaching video for the corresponding week.
- Suggested Weekly Order:
 - The Week One Class is an introduction to the study. This class includes a welcome, fellowship, introduction teaching, small group discussion of teaching time and icebreakers.
 - Each participant begins in the Welcome section in the workbook the following day.
 - The Week Two Class (and following) includes a teaching lecture on the most recent lesson and a small group discussion of the lesson.
 - Each participant begins the next lesson in their workbook the following day.
(Continue to follow this pattern)

Small Group Discipleship Time

- Following the teaching time, participants move into small groups. The small group leader begins by reading the prayer at the beginning of the Discussion Questions. The group then discusses how the Lord used the teaching lecture to speak to their hearts.
- Next, the small group leader begins the discussion of the week's homework. First, we will discuss the lesson's main themes and then review questions for each day.
- Finally, group members are asked to fill out a Care Card (see Exhibit A on page vii) so the leader can pray for them and assist them in areas where they may need help.
- The small group concludes by reciting the Scripture memory verse(s) for that lesson.

Taking the Truth to Heart Group Time

- After discussing the teaching lecture and homework, group members divide into smaller groups of three to four women. The group sizes may vary depending on the size of the initial group.
- Each group member will have an opportunity to share from their completed “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” page, previously completed at the end of each lesson on Day Six. To allow time for all women to share, we set a time limit of three minutes for each person. Holding a strict time limit helps the focus remain on God and His Word. The purpose of this time is not for women to “fix” one another, but to learn to confess their sins to one another while fixing 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 Guide” (see Exhibit D, page vii). This relationship allows group members to pray specifically for one another throughout the week.
- Group members are encouraged to remember God’s love through the gospel as they share transparently.
- If you have any questions about these steps, please get in touch with your small group leader as soon as possible. She will be happy to help you with any questions you may have.

What to Bring

- Bible
- Workbook
- Pen

Online Participants Suggested Study Schedule

Weekly Study:

Audio/Video Time

Daily Study in the Workbook

Taking the Truth to Heart Time

Begin with Teaching Video or Audio (available online)

- Each week, schedule a day and time to review to the teaching lecture.

Review Discussion Questions (available online)

- Pray, reflect, and notice how the Lord spoke to you through the teaching.
- Read the main point of the lesson and answer the Discussion Questions.

Daily Study in the Workbook

- The day after you watch or listen to the teaching lecture, begin your workbook homework with Lesson One.
- There are six days of homework in each lesson.
- Begin the homework each week after you watch or listen to the teaching lecture.


Taking the Truth to Heart

- On Day Six, complete the “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Exhibits C and 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. Share the pages via email or text. The purpose of this time is to enable women to identify their sin and confess it.
- Your online small group leader will personally respond to you and pray for you.
- 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.

Study Documents

These documents and more are available on our app (Begin Here) and website (Resources).

Exhibit A



Care Card

Name & Cell _____
 Date & Lesson Title: _____

Thistlebend Homework
 _____ I completed the homework I committed to do each day
 _____ I only completed _____ days of homework

The reason I did not fully complete my homework is: _____

Personal Spiritual Prayer Request: _____


Prayer Requests for Family & Friends: _____

Questions or Concerns: _____

Feedback

1. What was most helpful to you personally about the lecture?
2. Was there anything that was confusing or that you did not understand?
3. What was most helpful to you about the homework?
4. Was there anything that was confusing or that you did not understand?

Exhibit B



Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment


Why we are here:

- Because Christ first loved us and we want to follow Him, trusting His will for our lives, no longer living in the flesh for self anymore
- We want to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love others as ourselves
- We have witnessed the destructive power of sin in our own hearts and lives and by God's grace want to learn how to repent of our sin and walk forward by faith through grace in the power of the Holy Spirit
- We are ready to lay down our pride and humbly admit we don't have it all together and we need help
- We want the support of the body of Christ and are willing to allow someone else to speak truth into our lives because we know we have blind spots we cannot see
- We believe Jesus has called us to pick up our cross and follow Him and we want practical help to know that looks like in our lives

The goal and focus of this discipleship study is to learn how to:
 Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength
 and our neighbor as ourselves
 Live the gospel by grace through faith
 Take the Truth to heart and bring it to life
 Grow in our understanding of true discipleship
 Live for Christ because He died for us

Practically, this means earnestly pursuing the following by God's grace:
 Believing you have received the Spirit of sonship
 Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
 Picking up your cross and denying self
 Offering yourself as a living sacrifice
 Living as members of one body
 Faithful Obedience to God's Word
 Speaking the Truth in Love
 Forgiving as you have been forgiven

Exhibit C (See Day Six of Lesson One)



Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (Jas. 1:22)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)


PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back
 In what areas has the Lord given you wisdom, grace, repentance, or encouragement this week?

STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart
 Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day this week. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, or train you (2 Tim. 3:16-17)?

Day Six

Exhibit D (See Day Six of Lesson One)



Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

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. (Jas. 5:16)

NAME	Step One TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART SCRIPTURE	Step Two PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH SIN	Step Three BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE ACTION

Day Six



O God, You Are My God

O God, you are my God. (Ps. 63:1a)

One late spring morning I was perched high upon a rock, overlooking a spectacular vista of the Gulf of Maine. On my left was historic St. Anne's Church, a small rustic chapel constructed of large sea-washed stones taken from the gulf when it was built in the late 1800's. On my right was an outdoor chapel situated on a point at the mouth of the Kennebunk River. Waves were crashing below me, bursting into spray like fireworks on a Fourth of July night. Above me was a perfect, clear blue sky. The gentle wisps of clouds stretching across the vast canopy contrasted with the sharp, jagged edges of the rocky coast of Maine. The majestic grandeur of the scene was humbling and brought perspective. In the presence of God and His creation, I was lifted up, beyond the temporal, into a place of tender communion with the Lord. Overcome with praise and thanksgiving, I opened my Bible to a familiar psalm and poured out my heart to the Lord.

- 1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*
- 2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*
- 3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*
- 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Ps. 19:1-4)*

When I looked up, there, right before me, was a large schooner gracefully cutting through the waves as it was heading into harbor. The sun was now high in the sky. Along the shore came an older couple. As they approached the water's edge, they stopped, mesmerized by the view. The man and his wife stood motionless while watching the picturesque scene. Then in their awe they turned to look at each



other, kissed, and returned their gaze to the view. It was a beautiful picture of the shared love and tenderness that exists within a deep and abiding relationship. I realized it was also a glimpse of the sweet, intimate fellowship the Lord desires with His people, like the fellowship I was experiencing with Him that morning. In that moment on the gulf, the Lord was answering my ongoing plea that I might know Him more fully. I remembered the passage that I had read in my morning quiet time earlier that day.

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 19 And [God] said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." 21 And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." (Ex. 33:18-23)

I felt as though I was in the cleft of His love. I was experiencing His sovereign grace and His compassionate, willing condescension that He extends to those whom He calls to Himself. I pondered the truth of His Word and His faithfulness, that He is the God who responds to our prayers in ways beyond what we would ever expect. I journaled a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to Him. As I finished, I looked down. Wedged deep in the cleft of the rock by my side was a flat skipping stone in the shape of an Old Testament tablet. I picked it up and turned it over in my hands, feeling the smooth sides worn down by the sea. As a collector of rocks, I placed in my pocket this souvenir of my tender moment with the Lord.

The Lord wants us to walk with Him, side by side, step by step, with our hearts knit to His and His knit to ours, intimately sharing life's moments together. He is the one who hears our prayers and answers the cries of our hearts. Our God is so awesome and mighty, yet He is willing to meet with us, as small and insignificant as we are. He calls us to join with Him and enter into a deep and abiding relationship with Him. Intimate. Loving. Life-giving. Life-changing. Song of Solomon reads, "*My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; 11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'" (2:10-13 NRSV). The Lord seeks*



us earnestly. Let us respond gratefully to His tender invitation to join in His love and say in our hearts and with our lives, *“My beloved is mine, and I am his”* (Song 2:16).

There are those who consider Song of Solomon to have been written expressly about a romantic relationship between a husband and a wife. However, consider the possibility of a dual meaning in this book, one that also expresses the love relationship the Lord desires to have with His bride, the Church.¹ Particularly, in light of this passage from Ezekiel: *“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine”* (Ezek. 16:8). What is being conveyed is not romantic infatuation but true, abiding love from a passionate God who loves His people intimately.

It’s an amazing and awesome thing to consider that God Most High, Creator of the universe, desires an intimate relationship with His people. R.C. Sproul wrote, “Saint Augustine taught that God created the world out of nothing. Creation was something like the magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Except God didn’t have a rabbit, and He didn’t even have a hat. God created the world from nothing. Once there was nothing, then suddenly, by the command of God, there was a universe.”² The Bible begins with this very act: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”* (Gen. 1:1-3).

How and what could we desire more than to enter into an intimate, loving, and vibrant relationship with this God? This God, who has the unfathomable power and authority to create the universe from nothing with loving care, wisdom, and precision, desires a relationship with us. His Word tells us that He rejoices over His children greatly (Zeph. 3:17). For us, there is no sweeter thing in this world than communion with Him. As a husband desires the devotion and companionship of his wife, the Lord desires the devotion and companionship of His bride, the Church. He wants nothing more than to glorify Himself in and through us and for us to fully delight in Him. He says, *“I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people”* (Lev. 26:12); *“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved’”* (Rom. 9:25).

So, how do we enter fully and completely into His love? How is a relationship with God Most High even formed, and what is our part? How do we relate to the Creator of the universe—the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the one who is holy, perfect, almighty, and worthy of all of our worship and



all of our praise? You might wonder to yourself, “How can this God who is so holy, so magnificent, and so mighty desire a relationship with those who are as lowly as me?” Maybe you wonder if you have a real or genuine relationship with Him, or maybe you’re not sure if you have a sincere desire to be in relationship with Him at all. Furthermore, you may wonder if it is even possible to have a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord, especially when it can appear as though there is a vast chasm that separates you from Him, a chasm between His heavenliness and your earthliness that seems too far to bridge. These are all important thoughts and questions to consider as believers in the Lord.

The goal of this study is to explore these very things. It is about falling in love again with our Lord—or maybe falling in love with Him for the very first time. This expression, “falling in love,” is, of course, merely a colloquialism conveying the desire of our hearts to fully embrace God’s command to love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength (Deut. 6:5, Mk. 12:30) and the second great command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39). As followers of Christ, we want to know His love and have a relationship with Him that far exceeds all others, but often our spiritual eyes strain to see Him. We struggle to know how to love Him and seek after Him when we cannot see Him. We struggle to fully understand His boundless, unconditional love. We struggle to believe His Word and walk with Him by His grace. We may know that a beautiful, intimate, and full relationship with the Lord is possible, but we have been discouraged in *our* attempts to attain it, or we’ve experienced this relationship in part but have a desire for more.

Be encouraged; in this study, we are going to focus all of our attention on our relationship with the Lord and immerse ourselves in His Word so that we may know Him, love Him, and follow Him more than ever before. Psalm 63, a psalm of David, will be our guide and framework as we examine David’s relationship with the Lord and, by God’s grace, seek to emulate it. Throughout this study, we will continually ask the Lord to reveal Himself to us and teach us about the deep and abiding relationship He desires to have with us. We will learn how to obediently and earnestly follow Him.

As we begin our journey of falling in love again with our Lord, we must start with the gospel, God’s ultimate act of love through Jesus Christ. His love is the source of our salvation, and it is the very root of our relationship with Him. What do we mean when we talk about the gospel? The Bible says, “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (Jn. 3:16). This means Jesus Christ came down from heaven to pay the penalty for our sins, which is eternal death and separation from God. He was born in a manger, lived a perfect life, bore the wrath that we sinners deserved, died in our place, and rose again, overcoming sin and



death, so that we would have life eternal. Jesus now rules and reigns in heaven over all. Salvation is through Him alone. In perfect love, great mercy, and amazing grace, God, through Christ, made a way to rescue us from hell, eternal damnation, and separation from Him. Jesus made an amazing exchange: He took our sin and unrighteousness upon Himself on the cross and gave us His righteousness and Himself in return (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, forgiveness of sin and salvation is available to all who, by God's grace, put their faith in Christ. *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people"* (Titus 2:11). If we have believed in Christ and trusted in Him as our Savior, then we have been forgiven of all our sin, declared righteous before God, given Christ's righteousness, adopted as His very own, and given every spiritual blessing.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph.1:3-6)

God is our Father, and in Christ, we not only become part of His family, but He also gives us Himself. He is always with us, because when we put our faith in Christ, He literally dwells within us. *"We abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit"* (1 Jn. 4:13). He is *our* God and we belong to Him. The God of this universe is not far removed, hidden beyond the clouds, occasionally looking down on us and wondering how we are doing. No, God is ever present in all places at all times, intimately involved in our lives. Jesus said, *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Mt. 28:20).

God's love, as demonstrated in the gospel, is essential and foundational to every part of our being and our relationship with Him. The Bible tells us that God *is* love (1 Jn. 4:7-8, 16). If God Himself is love, then He is not only our example and standard for love, but our source of love as well.

Do you know this love? Are you walking in the reality of God's love for you? We want to not only know His love and live in His love, but we want to love Him back as He has loved us. Do you love Him with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength? Do you love Him in the way you would want to love Him, and do you love others the way you would want to be loved? Why are these fundamental thoughts and questions—things that may seem elementary—so important to all of us,



regardless of how long we have been Christians? Why is it so important to take the time and make the effort to think about them? Because God has commanded us to love Him with *all* of our heart, *all* of our soul, *all* of our mind, and *all* of our strength.

Of course, none of us can know God fully. None of us even know ourselves fully. Learning to love the Lord like this is a lifelong pursuit. We will always be working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), longing to grow and to be able to proclaim with great conviction and accuracy, “*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you!*” (Ps. 63:1). Although loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength may seem like an impossibility in this life, loving Him with our “whole heart” in one sense is possible. This excerpt from Mark Jones’ *Knowing Christ* explains why:

To love God with all of our strength, then, is to do so with all of our being, which involves the whole person, both body and soul. . . . Certainly no one disputes that Christ loves his Father with all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength. However, not all Christians are persuaded that they are capable of doing the same. Yet, as Augustine famously noted, God gives what he commands and so commands whatever he desires.

In the strength of the Spirit, Christians are able to love their Saviour with all of their being. The psalmist writes: “Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart” (Ps. 119:34). Keeping the law with the “whole heart” may be understood legally or evangelically. In a legal sense, only Christ loved God with his whole heart because the law requires perfect conformity, which we are unable to give. Nonetheless, in an evangelical sense, God, out of his love and mercy in Christ, enables us to love him with our whole heart. Our love is undoubtedly imperfect, but God, in his kindness to his children, accepts a sincere love as the fulfilment of our duty to love him with our “whole heart.” As we read in Romans 8:4, this occurs “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk . . . according to the Spirit.”

This should be a great source of encouragement for us. Why? First, because our hope exists ultimately in Jesus, who fulfilled this command perfectly in our place. We do not have to stand before God with only an imperfect love as our hope for entering heaven. Second, because of our union with Jesus, what is true of him becomes true of us. God enables us to obey this command and to love him and his Son, albeit imperfectly, with the totality of our being so that he may delight in the love he receives from his people.³



With all of this in mind, I would love to share a bit of my story with you to give you a picture of what this lifelong journey has been like for me so far. I was one who sang every hymn with fervor on Sunday mornings, knew every liturgical prayer and response almost by heart and joined the adult choir at the age of fifteen, even riding four miles on my bicycle to the weeknight practices. But I never paid much attention to Jesus or what He had to do with my daily life.

My salvation experience was powerful and instantly life-transforming. I was in my mid-twenties. My husband, Kevin, was out of town on business, and I was home alone caring for our six-month-old daughter. My mom came to visit to help me and to celebrate my birthday. On Saturday afternoon we were riding in the car, running errands together, having a bit of a heart-to-heart. I shared with her that although Kevin and I were going to church on Sundays, it took real effort to attend because it felt like an empty ritual. I had to drag myself out of bed and make myself go. I knew it was an important part of having a relationship with God, so I wanted it to be much more than an empty routine; I wanted to want to go to church.

My mom mentioned a church in the area that she thought I might like. The following morning we went. Unknowingly, we had the wrong time and arrived late. The service was well underway, so we stood quietly in the door. In what seemed like only a fraction of a second, something life-changing and heart-altering occurred. My eyes were opened. I had been “blind,” but now I could “see.” It wasn’t something that someone said or did in the service. It wasn’t something I did. It was none other than God the Holy Spirit moving in my heart in an indescribable moment. I understood in that instant, that Jesus was not merely a good man who lived, died, and was buried two thousand years ago; He was in fact the Son of God who rose again and was now living and reigning in heaven. I had believed in God and worshiped Him on Sunday mornings—or so I thought—but I never understood the purpose of this man, Jesus. He seemed to be an odd add-on. Unnecessary. Irrelevant. That morning, though, something was very different; I saw Jesus for who He was and believed that He was alive and reigning in heaven.

All of the things I had heard growing up in church were brought suddenly to the forefront of my mind: Jesus was the Lamb of God, Immanuel, God with us. He came to save His people from their sins. He took our sin upon Himself and took the punishment we deserved. He was crucified and died. Then He rose again. It was all coming together right before my eyes and it was personal. He was *my* Savior. He bore *my* sins. He was crucified on *my* behalf. It was a lot to take in and a lot to process.



Oddly, I don't remember saying anything to my mother before she left that day. However, when my husband returned home that evening, he came home to an entirely different wife. I couldn't stop talking about Jesus.

Something inside me was transformed. Never again did I struggle to get out of bed on Sunday mornings, no matter how little sleep I may have had the night before. The love of God and gratitude to Him for His grace compelled me. I fervently sought to grow in Christ in every way I could and pursued every avenue I knew in order to do just that. I volunteered on committees, participated in Bible studies, prayed, sang hymns, journaled, and volunteered more. I couldn't seem to get enough. I even wanted to devote my life to serving the Lord in full-time ministry.

Years went by. We had a second child, a third, and then a fourth. By this time, my husband had also come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. My passion and the pursuit for God continued. Along the way, the Lord led us to a new church. We were very thankful to be hearing the gospel preached more clearly than before and for the opportunity to participate in more Bible studies, but at the same time, something wasn't quite right. Authentic Christian fellowship seemed difficult to find. People in Bible studies would share their hearts and lives only to a point. It seemed as though everyone was afraid to let on that they had sin struggles. No one I knew talked about things below the surface—like their heart attitudes, thought life, weaknesses—let alone their failures. It seemed as though they needed to *look* like they had it all together, because “good” Christians don't have those sorts of problems.

Inwardly, I wondered, “Am I the only one who struggles with these things, with these thoughts, sins, weaknesses? Is there something wrong with me?” I tried to reach out and find answers, but no one seemed to understand. I knew for most people there was a very real pressure to conform to certain expectations and external do's and don'ts of being a “good” Christian as well as an internal temptation to not appear weak. It seemed that meeting those expectations took priority over dealing with and being aware of the hidden things of the heart or seeking to truly please God with humility and actually living out His Word.

I began to feel isolated and alone in my struggles and in my walk with the Lord. And it took a toll on my heart. The regular day-to-day demands of life with four children, a focused executive husband, and ongoing extended family crises just added to my growing feelings of failure and the pain of isolation and loneliness. I was stretched thin, growing weary, and running on empty. I didn't know what to do or how to respond. All of it was more than I could face head on, so I just steeled my resolve and focused on carrying on.



I realize now that I didn't know how to walk forward in the spiritual inheritance that God had given to me in Christ. I didn't know how to put my flesh to death, put my hope in God, and walk forward in the Spirit by grace through faith. A pastor once explained it this way: When we come to Christ, God gives us a toolbox. Each believer has this set of spiritual tools but not every believer knows how to use them. Growing in the Christian life is a process of learning to use the tools that God has given us in Christ. I had little idea of how to use them!

Maybe this is a good place to pause my story. Perhaps you identify with some or all of what I've shared so far or maybe you are one who has followed the Lord faithfully but you still long for more of Him. Countless women are in the same place that I was. There is something that keeps them from following the Lord fully and accessing by faith all that they have been given in Christ. Maybe it is an ideal, an expectation, a misconception, or even an idol. For many of us, it's not so much that we have lost our grip on the promises in God's Word; it's that we have never been taught how to fully integrate those promises into our hearts and apply them to our core thoughts and beliefs. It is a lifetime endeavor to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 3:18).

We can know the Bible cover to cover and not have any of it sown into our hearts by faith. We can be hard of hearing and blind to our sin. Our thoughts, words, and actions can be incongruous with what we may know and believe. We may be more like a child than we would ever want to admit, like the daughter who has been told over and over again not to leave her backpack in the front hall, but to put it in her room. She *knows* that she is not to drop it on the floor when she comes home from school, but she doesn't *know* it in such a way so as to put it into practice over her inclination to just drop it. Something that seems so simple in theory can be profoundly difficult in practice. A beautiful young bride I once knew couldn't stop eating when she was afraid. She longed to know how to trust the Lord and find her comfort and satisfaction in Him. However, her sorrow and sense of failure overwhelmed that trust, and she gained so much weight that she lost her ability to have children. Another woman I knew overcharged her credit cards because she didn't know how to overcome her sinful flesh and say no to her impulses. She felt powerless even though she knew an all-powerful God. Another woman I knew, a grandmother, continued to give herself over to worry instead of entrusting her fears about her grandchildren's choices to the Lord in faithful prayer. Our sinful flesh can short-circuit what we know and believe.

This is where it becomes clear that we need the help of the Holy Spirit and other Christians. We need one another for support, fellowship, love, encouragement, feedback, and accountability. We all are



sheep in need of a Shepherd, a patient Shepherd, who teaches us how to live what we believe. We don't want our flesh and its default habits to rule and reign; we want Christ to rule and reign in our hearts.

Being in God's Word with other women helps us guard our thinking and guard against the flesh. We want to learn how to live in Christ. We want to learn how to love one another and help each other love God and obey His Word.

It doesn't matter where we are now or where we have been; the Lord desires that we seek after Him. He wants us to seek after Him with all we've got, that He might truly be *our* God, that He might be our all in all. Please take a moment to think through what you have read today and close in prayer. You may use this suggested prayer to help you get started:

O God, you are my God. I want you to be my God. You are worthy of all my worship, all my praise, all my heart, soul, mind, and strength! Please meet me where I am and bring me closer to you. Thank you for promising in your Word that when we draw near to you, you draw near to us (Jas. 4:8). Wherever someone or something is taking your place, please reveal it to me by your grace. Grant me the repentance I need to humbly confess and forsake all else to seek your face and serve you only.



O G o d , A r e Y o u M y G o d ?

D A Y T W O

In Psalm 63:1, David proclaims, “O God, you are my God.” We want to be able to declare that with him with *all* of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. “O God, you are my God!” This confession is key because our love, devotion, and trust in Him impacts how we think about and respond to the Bible, which in turn impacts how we obey and apply the Bible to our lives. Love cannot be separated from obedience. Our doctrine—or set of beliefs—impacts our deeds, because our doctrine is derived from what we saturate ourselves in, whether it’s God’s Word or something else (like culture or academia or family/parental influence, etc.). Whether we realize it or not, we all hold to a set of beliefs that rules how we respond to life. The beliefs the Lord calls us to are being zealous in our love for Him, for His Word, and for good deeds, all for His pleasure and His glory. If we love Him, we will embrace His Word, and we will obey Him (Jn. 14:15). God will be our God.



Read Psalm 63:1-8 and listen to how David describes His relationship with God. Then turn to the Table of Contents at the beginning of the book. As you read the titles of the lessons, find each title in the passage below and underline it. Write your own brief prayer below each verse, expressing your heart’s response to each one.

- 1 *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*
- 2 *So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.*
- 3 *Because your [lovingkindness] is better than life, my lips will praise you.*
- 4 *So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.*
- 5 *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*
- 6 *when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

7 *for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

8 *My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.*



I would like to ask you to take a bit of a spiritual inventory, to prayerfully consider where you think you are in your walk with the Lord. Reflect on your relationship with Him, where it began, where you've been, where you are now, and where you hope to go. Ask the Lord to help you see where you are and where you need to grow. It may be helpful to read below what other women have written as you attempt to identify parts of your own story. We will continue this process of considering your story in tomorrow's lesson as well.

I have been in Bible study for at least fifteen years. I have taken every form of study from a list of popular teachers, the best of the best. They have been wonderful studies, and I gained a lot of knowledge, but I want to know how to apply this knowledge more effectively.

I know there is always something greater. I know there *is* more, always more. I want to know more of the Lord and His love. I am willing to do whatever it takes to continue to grow closer to Him and more in step with His Spirit.

I sense pride in my heart that continues to rear its ugly head. I want to learn how to truly pick up my cross and die to myself in every area of my life, particularly in the area of pride.

I have *almost* asked the Lord to do whatever it takes to make me completely surrendered to Him. There is a slight hesitation, but I am willing, even if it means that things might get difficult. I know that I have held back in the past because I did not want things to fall apart or to find out what He might ask of me. I feared what tragedy He might have brought into my life to bring me closer to Him.

Sometimes I am afraid. Really afraid. There is an inner lining of fear that clings to my soul. I wake up feeling afraid, like I have to figure everything out, yet not knowing how. I am afraid of what will happen if I don't . . . my house, my children, my marriage, or my world will crumble around me. I want to conquer this fear. Outwardly, I have things pretty much together. My appearance, my home, my family, my serving, what I say, who I know. But I know that everything isn't all that it seems.

I have this lost feeling. Lost equilibrium, lost identity, lost purpose, and no horizon line. When I do read the Bible, I feel like I am just filling my head with knowledge and that I am just a hearer of the Word rather than a doer. I want to feel different. I want to be different. I want to find my purpose.

I don't feel loved, and I feel very little love in my heart for anyone else. I don't know love. I am concerned about the outside—concerned about how things appear to others. I need to feel like a good mom. I want to grow closer to God, but I can't—there is a wall. I know something is wrong. I desperately want to love and to be loved! I am almost angry with God because He isn't answering! I want to hear from God!

I am hurting. One trial comes after another. It seems like they never end. Even before one stops, another starts. I can hardly lift my head—my heart is so heavy. I am ready to just give up or give in.

I want to have the fervor for the Lord and His Word and His ways like I used to have or like I thought I would or think I should. I pray, read my Bible, try to live according to God's Word, and help others, but there is an inner longing, an underlying concern, that I really can't put my finger on. And it doesn't go away.

Each day is a new day and I look forward to enjoying Him, serving Him, and loving others. I know that my knowledge for the Lord can always grow, and I want to deepen my intimacy with Him.

I feel hopeless. I can't see how things are ever going to work out or how I am ever going to overcome my weaknesses. I have no close friends.

I call myself a Christian, but I can barely pray. Even though I have a very strong biblical background, I hardly ever open my Bible during the week anymore. I feel all of my faith gradually slipping away. I want things to be different. I want to conquer this hopelessness and unbelief I feel, but I can't get there.

I often find myself sitting at my kitchen table or driving in my car thinking, "There has got to be more. I am no different than I was ten years ago. I am still struggling with the same things, and I do not know how to change. I feel so defeated and powerless."

I sense something isn't quite right in my spirit, but I have been afraid to admit it to myself. I want to share my concern with other Christian women, ask for prayer, and pursue Christ.

I love the Lord but I question my salvation. I see my sin and my sinful responses and continue to think that if I truly loved the Lord, I wouldn't think these thoughts or say these words.

I battle daily with my emotions, my fluctuating circumstances, and my thought life. When I first came to the Lord, I felt thankful and joyful and eagerly wanted to spend time with Him. But now I find myself struggling. I have done Bible study after Bible study and everything else I know to do, but my relationship with the Lord remains the same.

I haven't been that concerned about my relationship with the Lord . . . honestly I haven't given it a lot of thought. Any uneasiness or apathy I've felt is because I have thought this is just the way everyone must feel this side of heaven. After all, we are sinners saved by grace, and we live in a sinful world. I guess I've gotten lazy about pursuing the Lord.

Do any of these accounts resonate with you? Some of us are afraid to discover what lies beneath the surface, to see the unbelief and complacency connected to our sin. *Unbelief* because we cannot imagine God really being able to change our hearts. We can't remember ever being any other way, even though we have prayed and tried to change. *Complacency* because responsibilities of family, church, school, work, and other important daily tasks take precedence or because other things in life pull our attention away from the Lord—a favorite TV show, hobby, or social gathering. So the inner condition of our hearts is put on hold.

If this describes you, now is the perfect time to openly share your inner thoughts, questions, and doubts with the Lord and to ask Him for His wisdom, help, mercy, and grace to pursue Him from a pure heart. Prayerfully think about what, if anything, might be preventing further growth in your relationship with Him. The questions that follow are meant to spark your thinking process. Write what the Lord reveals to you as you ponder these questions and then bring those revelations before the Lord in prayer.

Are you afraid?

Do you feel all alone or let down?

Are you anxious about many things?

Do you think you know the Lord well and don't need more Bible study or accountability?

Have things not gone the way you expected?

Is God's plan for your life different than you wanted it to be?

Have you experienced one trial after another and feel spiritually exhausted?

Do you find yourself comparing?

Have you been hurt, rejected, overlooked?

Is there bitterness in your heart or are you holding a grudge?

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

Choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart.

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, encourage, or train you?

(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Remember God's love in the gospel, that you have died and Christ now lives in you.

Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



O G o d , Y o u A r e M y G o d !

D A Y T H R E E

God calls His people by name; we are His beloved. When the Lord quickens our hearts and we place our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become a child of God. He becomes our Father and our God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul breaks forth into praise as he considers all that has been given to us in Christ as God's beloved. Paul explains that God called us and chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. He has chosen us to be His adopted sons and daughters, and He has given us an inheritance according to His endless, heavenly riches. He has set us apart for His glory and purpose and has given us everything we need.

Read Ephesians 1:1-14. What does this passage say about who we are in Christ?



When we are in Christ, we belong to God by adoption. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 7:23), purchased with the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He stood in our place, the spotless one for sinful ones. He laid down His life to redeem us from worthless, worldly, and wanton living “*to purify for himself a people*” who would delight in Him and be “*zealous for good works*” (Tit. 2:14). Although many people might say God is their God and believe they are followers of Christ, much of their lives tell a different story. They exhibit the symptoms of a divided heart, worshiping idols of self, the world, and other people, not surrendering in worship to God alone. Assuming they are okay, they continue on, not aware there is a problem. They are not alone, and they are not the first to experience these symptoms. Jesus exhorted the Ephesian church by saying, “. . . *you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen . . .*” (Rev. 2:4-5). Read the following passage from Revelation.

Revelation 2:1-7 (Optional: Read all of Revelation 1-2)

Do you hear Jesus pleading with the church in Ephesus to love Him above all? He is speaking to the visible church in Ephesus, made up of believers and unbelievers,⁴ wanting them to examine their hearts because there is evidence of *unrepentant* sin among them. Jesus wants to be their all in all, their everything, and for nothing to take His place in their hearts. They may think they have forsaken everything else, but these verses show us that some still allowed many things and people to take His place in their hearts. Jesus was no longer number one to them, and as a result, they were missing out on the life and purpose He has for them.

Some tremble when reading Jesus' strong warning to the Ephesians that He would come and remove their lampstand if they did not repent. They fear this could mean they are not saved or that they could lose their salvation. As believers we will still sin, but unrepentant, persistent sin will not be a way of life for us. The mark of a true believer is that the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin and you desire to repent. Remember that the Christian life is a battle—against sin, Satan, the flesh, and the world. We must fight fervently against these foes, and fight to love the Lord with our all by forsaking all other loves. As we do this, we bear evidence that we are in fact His alone. Those who belong to Christ are ruled by Christ, are His forever, and cannot lose the salvation granted to them by Him.



Think through who or what you worship and who or what is ruling in your heart and life. The following list may be helpful in pinpointing areas of your life that have been claimed by someone or something besides the Lord. Mark any that might be true of you and bring them before the Lord in confession.

Is there anyone you haven't forgiven?

Do you find your deepest value in succeeding at something, finding your place, or being accepted?

Do you have a wrong focus on wealth or the wealthy?

Do you seek attention or notoriety or praise? Do you want to make a name for yourself?

Do you like to have everything under control?

Do you like to be in control and struggle when you're not?

Do you just want to have fun? Do you spend too much time on social media?

Are you afraid to uncover things that you won't know how to handle?

Do you find yourself getting angry often?

Is your mind continually wandering?

Is your heart craving material things, material comforts, or material satisfaction?

Do you find yourself thinking, "I want this," "I need that," "If only . . ."

Does discontentment, discouragement, or despair weigh you down?

Do you often think life is hard and you just want a break?

What hasn't been mentioned that may be in the back of your mind?



Who or what is on the throne of your heart? Is God your God? Your everything? Do you love Him like He would want you to love Him? Do you desire your relationship with Him to be deep and abiding? Do you want to be able to identify your sins and confess, repent of, and overcome them? Do you long to walk forward in the truth of God's Word and live in the power of Christ? If not, will you cry out to Him to do the work that is necessary in your heart? It may seem impossible, but because of God's amazing grace, it is not only possible, but it's what God made us for. Romans 5:8 says, "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Take this truth to heart and *believe* that God, your loving heavenly Father, and Jesus, His Son, love you with an everlasting, unconditional, purifying, perfect love and will bring to completion the good work begun in you (Phil. 1:6).

After reflecting on your relationship with the Lord over the past couple days, about where you are and where you need to grow, take a moment to summarize what the Lord has shown you. Ask Him for His grace to walk forward in the rest of this study with humility, joy, hope, and a soft heart that desires Him above all things.

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

Choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart.

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, encourage, or train you?
(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Remember God's love in the gospel, that you have died and Christ now lives in you.
Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.

I s J e s u s M y S h e p h e r d ?

D A Y F O U R

Before we immerse ourselves specifically in Psalm 63 and learn to earnestly seek after the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, I want us to come to the Lord as our Shepherd. Throughout your lesson today, call out to the Lord to lead you with His Shepherd's staff, to provide His love, care, mercy, and grace, and, if necessary, to grant you a heart of repentance. If you don't truly know Him as your personal Lord and Savior, this is an opportune time for you to come to know His love through Jesus Christ. He stands with His arms open wide, and He is waiting for you. For those who have known the Lord and experienced His love, this is your perfect time too. There is nothing to fear in understanding and believing that God loves you and desires an intimate relationship with you. It is a pivotal step in entering into a deeper, more radical love relationship with Him. First John 4:18 states, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.*" If we are going to truly fall in love again with God, we must get rid of anything that would separate us from Him and hold us back from knowing Him more. We must believe His Word is true—and true for us personally—and meditate on the truths of the gospel.

Today, we will focus on Psalm 23 so that we can more clearly see God as our gentle Shepherd, the one who loves us tenderly and completely. Read Psalm 23 slowly and ponder what the psalmist is saying about God. The remaining homework for today will walk us through the psalm verse by verse to help us examine our hearts in light of being led by our Shepherd.

- 1 *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.*
- 5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*
- 6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*



The Good Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (Ps. 23:1-2)

Matthew Henry said, “David was himself a shepherd . . . so he knew by experience the cares and tender affections of a good shepherd towards his flock. He remembered what need they had of a shepherd and what a kindness it was to them to have one that was skillful and faithful; he once risked his life to rescue a lamb.”⁵ When we think of David as a shepherd, this should direct our thoughts to Jesus, who said, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*” (Jn. 10:11). If the Lord is our Shepherd, then we must be His sheep. No matter where you are in your walk with the Lord, commit to follow Him wherever He leads you as His sheep. Determine to believe that you will want for nothing. Ask the Lord to help you to be trusting, obedient, and meek before Him, knowing that He is your good Shepherd. Choose to believe that He will tenderly lead you to green pastures and still waters where you will find nourishment and peace.

In what ways or areas do you need the Lord to help you trust Him more?



Restorer of Souls

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Ps. 23:3)

The Lord our Shepherd watches closely over His sheep and restores them to Himself when they wander. David knew well what it was to be a shepherd, but he also knew what it was to be a sheep. He wandered from the Lord in his own life, and the Lord restored him. The Lord watches over us and keeps us. As we grow in Christ, we learn more and more how vulnerable we are to temptation and understand our propensity to sin. Ask the Lord to meet you right where you are. Ask Him to tenderly minister to your soul and show you any areas of vulnerability, sin, pride, or unbelief. Take time to confess where you might be weary, struggling, or wandering.

Lord, I confess:

Now read through the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Ask the Lord to help you grow in and demonstrate fruit in your life. Trust Him to restore you and lead you on the right path.

Love	Goodness
Joy	Faithfulness
Peace	Gentleness
Patience	Self-Control
Kindness	



Through the Valley

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. (Ps. 23:4)

Death may cast its shadow over us, but that is all it can do to Christians. We have been delivered from death and its sting in Christ. But walking through this valley of the shadow of death can still feel very treacherous at times. It can be a walk that brings us to our knees and penetrates the very marrow of our bones and the depths of our soul. But these valleys are fruitful, just as David implies in Psalm 63. We can come to know beauty in these dark and seemingly dangerous times in our lives and learn to walk through them with our eyes upon God and His glory. Note, too, it is a walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death; we will not be lost in this valley. (John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is helpful in understanding our spiritual journey. I encourage you to read it.) Hear the Lord say, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Will you follow your Lord? Will you trust and believe? Will you rest in the comfort of His rod and staff? There is much to learn. There is much to see. Come through the valley. What are some of the deep, dark valleys the Lord has walked you through? Are you in one today?

How have your valleys been fruitful?



My Cup Overflows

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Ps. 23:5-6)

An overflowing cup is one that is full. More than full. And in Christ, we have that overflowing cup. God has given us everything we need and more. He is our loving provider. His

lovingkindness is abundant, plentiful, and sufficient for all our needs in life and godliness. As our protector, He anoints our heads with oil (c.f. Eccles. 9:7-8, Lk. 7:46). Although David appears to switch imagery from a shepherd and sheep to a banquet, it's interesting to note that the anointing imagery still applied well to the shepherd and sheep relationship. In ancient times a shepherd took very personal and individualized care of the sheep. During certain seasons, the sheep would be afflicted by flies, mosquitos, fleas, ticks, and other insects. These insects would attack the heads of the sheep, burrowing into their ears and noses. The results could range from irritation to disease and even death. To protect the sheep from the pests, the shepherd would make a mixture with olive oil and anoint the head of the sheep, rubbing the oil into its wool and especially around its nose, eyes, and ears.⁶

As Christians we may avoid the larger, more obvious dangers of life only to fall prey to the little things of life that irritate, frustrate, or cause infection. It is the little things that cause many Christians to lose heart, to get discouraged, or to get upset and offended at people.⁷

Where do you need healing? Where do you need help from the Shepherd of your soul, in your mind, your heart, or your body?



Remember, the Lord knows the number of hairs upon your head. He knows everything about you and watches over you day and night. You have nothing to fear. Bring to Him your cares and concerns, your hurts and heartaches, and entrust them all to Him. Look to Him to care for you. May your heart overflow with love, joy, and thanksgiving.

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

Choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart.

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, encourage, or train you?
(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Remember God's love in the gospel, that you have died and Christ now lives in you.
Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



D O I L O V E G O D W I T H A L L M Y H E A R T ?

D A Y F I V E

Over 3,000 years ago, God’s spokesperson, Moses, the mediator between God and the nation of Israel, proclaimed this command from God: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”* (Deut. 6:4-5).

Almost 1,500 years later, these same words resounded from the lips of God’s only Son, the one and only true mediator between God and all of humanity, Jesus Christ: *“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mk. 12:30).

Can any of us truly say that we have loved the Lord like this? How can we love like this, especially when our hearts are often distracted, empty, drained, or dry? David knew the source of love, true life, and unlimited refreshment when he cried out to God. He understood that apart from God we aren’t capable of truly loving anyone, let alone God. The good news, or gospel, is that we *are* able to have an intimate, one-on-one, life-transforming love relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How is this kind of intimate relationship possible? Through God’s amazing grace, which empowers us to focus on Him and seek after Him with all we’ve got in a single-minded, wholly devoted pursuit. As we ask, He will answer; as we seek, He will make Himself known; as we knock, the gateway into an ever-deepening love relationship with Him will be opened to us, and we will know Him as never before.



As we pursue falling in love with the Lord, we will be studying the heart cry of a man, David, who longed after God. David was an ordinary man who intimately knew both his frailty and the unrelenting love of his extraordinary God. He was a man who talked with God moment-by-moment, and his relationship with God was so intimate and real that the Lord recorded his heart and transparent thoughts in the Bible for us to see and experience. David’s relationship with God is a model, a picture of what it would look like to walk side by side with Almighty God, with our hearts knit to His and His heart knit to ours. It is a picture of a relationship that is real and raw. In his psalms, it is as if a door is opened for us to enter into the private place of David’s unguarded, intimate dialogue with God Most High. As we read these psalms, we see how David entrusted everything to God—his life and his heart.

Psalm 63 beautifully describes what God did for me as I sought after Him and cried out to Him to be my God. And it is what God can do for you as you seek after Him with your all and cry out to Him to make the statements in this psalm true of you. Over the next few weeks, we will be studying, thinking about, praying through, meditating on, and memorizing Psalm 63. We will look at one or two verses from it each week and explore them in depth, allowing God's Word to speak to our hearts. Today, we will again read through Psalm 63:1-8 and then pray it to the Lord.

As you read, circle or underline the words that speak to your heart. Using the words you marked, write your own heart cry to the Lord in the space provided.

- 1 *O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*
- 2 *So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.*
- 3 *Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.*
- 4 *So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.*
- 5 *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*
- 6 *when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*
- 7 *for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*
- 8 *My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Psalm 63:1-8)*



Ponder with me for a moment . . . if we truly believed there was nothing impossible for and no limit to what God could do (which, of course, there isn't!), what would our lives look like? What would our lives look like if we sincerely desired to know and love the Lord above all things? What would it be like if we sought after a deep and intimate relationship with the Lord with our entire being? What if we asked Him daily to give us ears to hear Him speak to us in His Word in our quiet time and as we walk along the way? Do you want to have His still, small voice speak softly in

your ear and have His presence lead you in the path of righteousness and steady your heart through the valley of the shadow of death?

We want to be holy as He is holy. We want to be able to know Him and His Word in such a way that we can say, “This is what God says in His Word, and because this is what He says, this is what I am going to do.” We want to do what He says because we love Him, and we love Him because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). There is an inseparable union between love and obedience. In John 14:21, Jesus says, *“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him.”*

Know that there is nothing the Lord Jesus wants more than for us to truly know Him, deeply love Him, and intimately enjoy Him. This won’t happen overnight, nor will a relationship of any depth and intimacy develop as we simply go about our daily routine oblivious to the presence of God and His purpose for our lives. No, this kind of relationship is developed over time as we passionately pursue the Lord and consistently invest ourselves in daily devotion to Him, in time set apart away from the world, and in active obedience to Him. The Lord Jesus set the example for us. In meeting with His Father daily for fellowship and guidance, Jesus demonstrated for us the necessity of setting aside time each day to spend with God. We need this time of fellowship alone with Him to hear His voice, fix our hearts toward Him, enjoy Him above all, and walk according to His Word.

Know also that there is nothing else that the enemy, the Devil, wants to do more than to prevent us from setting apart time alone with God in His Word. This battle is great! The enemy will do all he can to convince us that there are other “more important” things to do. The busier life becomes, with more intense demands upon our day, the less time it appears we have to spend with the Lord. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to stand firm in our commitment to grow in our love for Him. This responsibility is what it means to pursue a deep, abiding, and holy relationship with the Lord, the kind of fellowship the Lord desires with His people. He wants us to walk with Him, side by side, step by step, with our hearts knit to His and His knit to ours, sharing life’s moments together, as we glorify Him and enjoy Him in all things.

Listen to your Beloved's words to you: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, 11 for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away" (Song 2:10-13).

In anticipation of the remainder of the study, I would like to ask you to pray in light of all you have read and reflected upon this week. God called and chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4). He lavishly poured out His love on us by giving us Jesus and making us His adopted sons and daughters. Ask the Lord to grant you His grace that enables you to earnestly seek after Him with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, and all of your strength.

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

Choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart.

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, encourage, or train you?
(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Remember God's love in the gospel, that you have died and Christ now lives in you.
Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (Jas. 1:22)

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back

In what areas has the Lord given you wisdom, grace, repentance, or encouragement this week?

STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day this week. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

How is God using this Scripture to teach, instruct, reprove, correct, or train you (2 Tim. 3:16-17)?

STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? If you are convicted of that sin confess it in writing.

Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

Ask for the Lord's forgiveness and receive His mercy and grace (1 Jn. 1:9-10).

What do you now need to "put off" from your old self or adjust in your thinking, beliefs, attitude, or behavior in order to submit to God and apply His truth to your mind and heart (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5-9)?

STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life

Walking forward in repentance and faith, by God's grace, what will you "put on" (Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10, 12, 14)? How are you going to do this?

Be specific in your plan of action and find encouragement by what the Lord is going to do.

Remember God's love in the gospel, that you have died and Christ now lives in you.

Walk in love. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to practice your weekly memory verse. Write it below.



Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

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. (Jas. 5:16)

NAME	Step One TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART SCRIPTURE	Step Two PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH SIN	Step Three BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE ACTION
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