

Jesus, I Want to Love You

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY



Focus Scripture

MATTHEW 5 – 7



Jesus, I Want to Love You

Focus Scripture: Matthew 5-7

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

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Jesus, I Want to Love You

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2006 (At His Feet)

Thistlebend Cottage Press

2212 Lakeland Road

Louisville, Kentucky 40223

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Thistlebend Ministries is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

This study and its corresponding resources are made possible through the generous contributions of the Friends of Thistlebend and people like you.



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are located on the last page of this study.**

I



The Love of Your Life

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). “By this we can be sure that we have come to know Him: if we keep His commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3). “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5:3). “And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the very commandment you have heard from the beginning, that you must walk in love” (2 Jn. 1:6).

“**D**o-do-do-do-do, do-do, do-do, do-do-do-do-do, do-do, Jesus is just alright with me, Jesus is just alright, oh yeah,” sang the Doobie Brothers in their 1972 hit single. Jesus isn’t just alright with me; He is everything! He is the love of my life and I want to love Him more fully each day, *“with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, and with all my strength”* (Mk. 12:30) And I know that I am not alone in this desire. What about you? Have you come to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Do you want to love Him more than ever, because He first loved you?

My love for Jesus is not my own doing; rather, it is a gift He freely gave because of His great love for me. Jesus loved us, therefore He died for us God knew that we would never be able to fulfill the righteous requirements of His law. In love, He sent His Son to accomplish what we could not. True love is something found in the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose love extends far beyond our comprehension (Eph.3:14-19). Apart from Him, we will never know true love or be able to fulfill His command to love. When we trust Him, He forgives us and draws us into His love, so we can love Him. Since I am united with Christ in His death and resurrection, I no longer want to live for myself, but for Him, the One who loved me and laid down His life for me (Gal.2:20; Rom.6:1-11). Jesus explained to His disciples, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (Jn. 14:15). Obedience to Christ’s commandments is both the measure and manifestation of love for Him.

Jesus gives us His love and His righteousness so that we may know and obey Him and live in His love now and forever. Since He has given us all we need, we can love and obey Him in good times and bad, when we are afraid, when our emotions loom larger than life, when we are tempted to give in to our selfish desires, or when we want to take control. Love and obedience are inseparable. Learning how to keep His commandments begins with knowing what Jesus taught, knowing what matters to Him, and ultimately knowing Him more than we know anyone. We want to know what is pleasing to Him not merely for the sake of knowledge, but because we want to love Him and obey Him. So we will sit at Jesus' feet, listening to His Words and His heart. As Jesus' disciples we will immerse ourselves in the Sermon on the Mount, to learn about the heart, character, and behavior of those who have been redeemed by the Lamb of God.



CHRIST IS OUR TRUE LOVE

Beloved ones, Christ is our life. Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our one true love. We are in Him, and He is in us. The more fully we believe this truth, the more we will enjoy Him and His love, and the more we will glorify Him. We must believe what we have been given—Christ's righteousness, His love, His Spirit, His grace—knowing that it is God who transforms our hearts and renews our minds. Essentially, this truth is what Paul meant in Philippians 2:12-13, *“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,¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* Instead of living according to the ways, mindset, and powerlessness of your old, nature—believe by faith that the Spirit, the power, and the love of Christ are now in you.

Everything perfect and good that we have is from God, and we know this. However, in the midst of daily life, we sometimes lose touch with Him. We get caught up in the challenges of the day, the world around us, our feelings, and more. There is no place that we can go that He is not, but it does not always feel that way. We can feel all alone. Discouragement and despair begin to set in. Life is not only difficult; it is a battle. Just like sheep need a shepherd to remain safe and continue on the right path, we need to follow our Lord closely to keep from becoming entangled in the world, lost in ourselves, or deceived by the enemy. Daily, hourly, minute by minute we must cling to the promises of God, knowing they are true whether they feel true or not. We have to ask the Lord for His grace to help us follow Him, to love Him, and to extend His love to others. Ask yourself, “Where am I putting my hope? Am I walking in step with you, Lord?” Throughout the day, recite a short prayer like this in your heart: “Lord, I want to love you. Help me love you with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love others as I would want to be loved. Help me fix my eyes on you and follow you—no matter what happens or what someone says or does.”

In 1707, Isaac Watts penned a hymn which speaks powerfully to our hearts today. I encourage you to make his lyrics your prayer. Consider the profound truth that we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. We want Christ to be the love of our lives. May Christ's love for us and our love for Him be the motive for all we do!

Awake My Zeal, Awake My Love

by Isaac Watts, 1707 (adapted)

Awake, my zeal; awake, my love,
To serve my Savior here below,
In works which perfect saints above
And holy angels cannot go.

Awake, my soul, to feed
The hungry soul, and clothe the poor;
In Heav'n there are none in need,
Their hearts are full forevermore.

Subdue my passions, O my soul!
Maintain the fight, God's work pursue,
Daily my rising sins control,
And the vic'tries be ever new.

The land of triumph lies on high,
There are no foes to encounter there;
Lord, I would conquer till I die,
And finish all the glorious war.

Let every flying hour confess
I gain Thy Gospel fresh renown;
And when my life and labors cease,
May I possess the promised crown!

Such God-glorifying hymns arise from lives consecrated to God in holy love. As we read the hymns of the old saints like Watts, we can envision their hearts exalting God, worshiping Him in spirit and truth, living lives of holiness, and loving the Lord with their all. God is glorified in and through their hymns. May we love the Lord like this; may we hunger after a deeper and more intimate communion with Jesus. May we say with all of our heart, "Jesus, I want to love you!" May God grant us His grace to fully embrace Christ, make His call our own, and Him our sole pursuit. We must lay aside any thought of personal gain or loss, worldly comfort or misery, fame or shame

and in our weakness, believe that true fellowship with Christ and the love of God transcends anything on this earth and transforms us more and more into His likeness.

...

WE ARE WEAK

On any given day our souls can ache from the effects of indwelling sin. Our hearts grieve deeply, and we falter in our weakness. Some days are much worse than others. Even as believers who have the Spirit of God within, we feel vulnerable and weak. J. C. Ryle, a respected 19th century theologian acknowledges,

“Even after conversion he carries within him a nature prone to evil, and a heart weak and unstable as water. That heart will never be free from imperfection in this world, and it is a miserable delusion to expect it. To keep that heart from going astray, the Lord Jesus bids us ‘watch and pray.’ The spirit may be ready, but the flesh is weak. There is need of a daily struggle and a daily wrestling in prayer (Mk. 14:38; 1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 7:23-24; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:5).”¹

The winds change and the storms of trial can come into our lives and hover for months, years, even decades. Sometimes, it even seems like God is opposing us. Our faith is tested and tried. In the throes of a trial, so many thoughts crash, collide, and careen through our heads causing conflicting thoughts and feelings. Haunting emotions and memories rise up from the past and reverberate in the soul. The flesh and the Spirit war within us. The enemy takes the opportunity to distract, discourage, or derail us at every turn.

The Lord allows the battle to continue. We wonder, we writhe, we ask why. We question God’s love for us and our love for Him. We can see the frailty of our frame and cry out with the Puritan, “O Lord, I am a shell full of dust . . . I am no rare object of valuable price, but one that has nothing and is nothing . . . I am deeply convinced of the evil and misery of a sinful state, of the vanity of creatures.”² In times like these, I long for the day Isaac Watts describes in his hymn, *Absent from Flesh*:

Absent from flesh! O blissful thought!
What unknown joys this moment brings!
Freed from the mischiefs sin has brought,
From pains, and fears, and all their springs.

Absent from flesh! Illustrious day!
Surprising scene! Triumphant stroke.
That rends the prison of my clay;
And I can feel my fetters broke.

We await the day when sin will be overcome once and for all. Gone. But until then, we want to do everything we can to overcome our flesh. We want to pursue God, because apart from His grace, we run headlong in the opposite direction to pursue self. Let us ask Him to deepen our desire to wholly love Him. If we love Him, we will follow Him, take up our cross, and die to self. As we come face to face with weakness and sin, the suffering may seem too much for us to bear, but we want to walk with our hearts knit to Christ's throughout the day, no matter how severe the crisis is that might come our way. We always want to look to Him—and no one else—for acceptance, approval, and for all of our joy. *He* is our great reward and we want to possess the godliness that He longs for us to have:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. . . .²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. . . .²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. . . .³¹ If God is for us, who can be against us?³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? . . .³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . .³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:18, 26, 28, 31-32, 35, 37-39)

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TRUE PERSPECTIVE BRINGS LIFE

God the Father in these last days spoken to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1). The Apostle John proclaims that “*the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning*” (Jn. 1:1-2). “*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (Jn. 1:14). Jesus came to seek and save the lost, to live a perfect life, die for our sin, and rise again, “*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*’ (which means, God with us).²¹ ‘*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*’” (Mt. 1:23, 1:21). Jesus loves His church dearly, tenderly, and deeply. She is His bride, His beauty. He demonstrated His

boundless love for her by coming to earth to be with her, washing her with the water of the Word, taking her sin upon Himself, dying in her place, and rising again overcoming sin and death. The gospel. The perfect love of God.

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by describing the result of gospel transformation in the heart of a believer—eight statements beginning with the word *blessed* known as the Beatitudes. Together, they paint a beautiful picture of the true disciple of Christ who is the heir of the promises of God. They are affirmations of God’s grace, not conditions of salvation; they are evidences of Christ within, not a passport to gain entry into His kingdom. In “Jesus, I Need You,” we focused on the Beatitudes. In this study, we turn our attention to the remainder of the sermon.

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most well-known parts of Jesus’ teaching, yet some say it is the least understood and obeyed. In this sermon, Jesus describes the heart and lifestyle of His followers, who love Him and live in His kingdom. He doesn’t sugar coat His message. Listen as He launches in to His manifesto of kingdom righteousness:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:17-20)

Jesus wants His bride to be one with Him in relationship—to know Him and love Him fully—and to be one with Him in the ministry of the gospel (Jn. 17:20-24). In this holy oneness, the deepest fulfillment of that relationship is lived out—a secret garden, so to speak, where the seeds of our union with Him are nurtured, developed, and matured. His words of love can be difficult to hear and His vision hard to grasp because divine truth can become covered with the vines of legalism, humanism, and idolatry. Jesus came for the express purpose of tearing down those old vines of legalism and uprooting the weeds of empty religion, in order to restore the beauty of the garden of the Lord. He came to fulfill the law, to complete the requirements of the Old Covenant and establish the New. He teaches us to obey the law, but by His grace. We do not want a superficial or legalistic perspective of His law. Jesus came so that we might have life and have it abundantly. There is grace—amazing grace. There is power. We have been given in Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount, we will look closely at our loving, compassionate Savior; our beloved bridegroom; and our tender shepherd who longs to embrace, encourage, and edify us, His sheep. Of course, we may struggle to fully understand this love: a love so gentle, so patient, and so

kind. We may have that “Aha!” moment and then minutes later an “Oh, no!” moment. So quickly we can fall prey to fear, condemnation, doubt, and worry. We can feel as though God stands over our shoulder ready to condemn our flaws, but nothing is further from the truth! He stands by our side, waiting, ready to extend His hand. There is no greater sound in Jesus’ ears than to hear us knocking on His door to tell Him how we long for Him, how we want to know Him and truly love Him, how we desire His righteousness, and how we long to walk with Him in His truth. Jesus yearns for us to know Him and to enjoy, embrace, and live in Him so that our deepest hunger, passion, and needs can be met in Him.

We know we can not do this in our own strength. Over the next few weeks, we will be looking to Jesus to teach us about His righteousness and truth, so that we might come to love and adore Him more. First, we are going to listen to Jesus’ own words in the Sermon on the Mount, calling for righteousness. Then, we will focus on the various subjects He unpacks in Matthew 5-7.

...

TRAVEL LIGHT

As you embark on this leg of your journey through the Sermon on the Mount, keep in mind that Christ is the only one who knows the way that is passable, and His assistance is truly critical. Without His love, His grace, and His compassion, you just can’t make it through. His ways, and His perspective are so different from anything else you know, and they will be your comfort, your light, and your wisdom. Jesus is your loving Savior who took the punishment for all of your sin and gave you His righteousness. He will show you the way.

If it is your desire to truly love Jesus more, prepare now. Make a plan. Set aside a specific time to do your quiet time. Prioritize. Put the demands of this present world in their proper place, and sit at His feet. When we seek Christ first, He accomplishes all we need. Ask Him to open your heart to hear His words and to give you the grace to respond in faith. I am praying for the Lord to work in all our hearts, that you and I may know His love and love Him in a way we never thought possible.

Close today with prayer.

Day Two



QUIET MOMENT

A significant portion of our last study, *Jesus, I Need You* (Part One of this series), focused on the opening verses of the Sermon the Mount, known as the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes were revolutionary when Jesus spoke them to the crowd near the Sea of Galilee. They reverberated like an earthquake in the hearers' hearts and minds—they had never heard teaching like this. Even today as we read them, these truths turn our world upside down. Jesus describes the gospel's effects in a transformed heart: the foundation for rightly understanding the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we see the divine dimensions of God's Kingdom in the human heart.

As we continue our study in the Sermon on the Mount, we want to remind ourselves that these words are Jesus' words, unfolding His heart and kingdom perspective before us. If we want to love Jesus more, what better way could there be than to listen attentively to Him?

I would like us to read the beginning of Matthew 5 as foundational context for our study. Please pray before you begin and ask the Lord to illuminate these verses. Ask Him how these verses apply to you. God's Word is meant for each of us, each day, wherever we are. Be encouraged to know that He sees all of your circumstances, all of your strengths, and all of your weaknesses. God is working even now to bless you and to bring about His glory in you to exalt His name. As you follow His path of righteousness you are doing a great work!

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Mt. 5:1-12)

Thoughtfully write the eight Beatitudes below, word for word. After each Beatitude, write either your observations from the *Jesus, I Need You* study (if you participated in that study), or what you currently understand each one to mean. You may want to refer to your notes from this week's opening lecture. Do not be concerned if you are unsure or do not think you fully understand each one.

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

Blessed are . . .

Your thoughts:

GOING DEEPER

1. Let us continue on in Matthew 5, again revisiting a passage we studied in *Jesus, I Need You*. This text describes the underlying principle that the commands to follow illustrate and, I believe, the end result of faithfully following the path of righteousness detailed in the Beatitudes and in the Sermon on the Mount.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Mt. 5:13-16)

What does the Lord say you are? Underline the phrases He uses to describe you. How then shall you live?

Trusting in God's loving ways, boldly and bravely ask Him to accomplish these things in your life. Next, underline the statements contrasting the value of a disciple versus a non-disciple. What do you learn?

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

From today's texts, choose one Scripture 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, your death with Christ, His life 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.

Day Three



QUIET MOMENT

After Jesus lays out the path of righteousness in the Beatitudes, He explains that He has come to fulfill the law, not destroy it. His teaching is revolutionary but not as man would think!

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:17-20)

What do you hear Jesus saying in regard to the law? How can we measure up to the standard?

How can anyone have a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees?

GOING DEEPER

1. Read the following passage from the latter part of Matthew's gospel. These are Jesus' own words to the Pharisees who were clothed with self-righteousness. Remember these words are not the opinions of a great theologian or the musings of a renowned scholar. They are the words of your Lord. Read with pen in hand and write each warning that pierces your heart.

Matthew 23

Jesus explained in Matthew 5:20 that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is impossible for our righteousness to surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees unless we get our righteousness from Jesus. Apart from Christ, we cannot

display the righteousness He requires—but He can. The common definition of self-righteousness is being convinced of the superior rightness of our own behavior and thinking. Biblically speaking, self-righteousness is believing we can achieve a standard of righteousness by our own efforts that will be acceptable to God (Rom. 3:10). As Christians we know this is wrong thinking but because of our remaining sin, we are continually tempted to seek to be righteous in and of ourselves. We feel fear and condemnation when we fail thinking that God does not love us because we have sinned yet again. When our life is hidden in Christ, we must remember that Christ is our righteousness. We have no righteousness of our own. When we lay down our lives, die to self, His life is magnified in us. Our “death” brings His life. It is the gospel in action; it is not I, but Christ.

We must preach the gospel to ourselves daily, moment by moment. Ask the Lord to shine light into your heart so that you can burn more brightly remembering that “*Perfect love casts out all fear*” (1 Jn. 4:18). God loves you and wants to gently show you where you can line yourself up more with His Word. Ask Him to help you see and obey the things He shows you, such as fear or unbelief.

2. Christ alone is righteous. All our righteousness is found in Him and Him alone. At our spiritual birth we are given the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to give us the power to practice righteousness, we have no righteousness of our own. We are counted as righteous even though we still have remaining sin. His righteousness is manifested in how we live and interact with others. Read the following passages and note what you learn about your indwelling sin and your beautiful Savior.

Colossians 1:13-14

Colossians 1:19-23

Colossians 2:6-15

Colossians 3:1-3

Colossians 3:12-17 (This passage reflects our response to being counted righteous before God because of what Christ accomplished on our behalf.)

3. God's law points to our need for a sacrifice, ultimately, the sacrifice of Christ. He is the fulfillment of the law. The law points to the truth. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the King of righteousness. He is our righteousness, the righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. Read the Scriptures below and note what you learn about righteousness and who you are in Christ.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.(Is. 61:10)

Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pt. 1:1)

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. (1 Jn. 2:29)

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor. 5:16-17)

And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
(Eph. 4:24)

And [that I may] be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Phil. 3:9)

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. (1 Jn. 3:7)

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.
(1 Jn. 3:10)

Praise be to God for His mercy and grace to us in Christ. Our hearts are transformed by the Holy Spirit bringing about internal righteousness and holiness. It is through His power that we are able to practice righteousness. To God be the glory!

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

From today's texts, choose one Scripture 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, your death with Christ, His life 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.

Day Four



QUIET MOMENT

We may understand and affirm intellectually how our love for Jesus relates to walking in His righteousness, but are we living this out in life's routine moments? As we seek to be set apart, to be in the world and not of it, we really must keep watch over our hearts. Listen to the apostle Paul's heart in the following passages and know that it reflects the heart of Christ for you.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

What does Paul pray the Philippian saints would be filled with?

Take a moment now and pray along with Paul: "Lord, may my love abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that I may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." In another letter, Paul prays for the Ephesian church.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19)

Read Ephesians 4:22-24. How can our love abound more and more? How do we express our love for Christ? What does Paul tell the Ephesians to do?

GOING DEEPER

1. Let us take a look at a passage from Romans to prepare our hearts to listen to Jesus as we sit at His feet. He came to fulfill all righteousness. He is the one who chose us, before the foundation of the world, to be His (Eph. 1:4). We want to listen carefully because many of us who call ourselves Christians often look more like the world around us than we realize. We tend to look at sin from man's perspective, but we want to see sin from Jesus' perspective. I also pray that we will have a compelling desire to be united with Him in His death so that we will desire, more than anything in this world, to live in His resurrection! We want to be instruments of righteousness; we want to live out the Sermon on the Mount. Let us offer ourselves and our lives to God. May we be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. May our light shine before men in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:16).

Read Paul's appeal in Romans 6 to put to death our human ways and our deeds of the flesh. Underline in your Bible the instructions Paul gives you. When you are finished reading, write out the key points you observed about righteousness in the space below. All of these words may sound familiar, but let us ask the Holy Spirit to bring them to life for us.

Romans 6:1-23

We must put off self in order to put on Christ's righteousness.

2. After considering Romans 6, will you join me in asking God's help to offer ourselves and our lives as instruments of righteousness? Take a few moments in prayer. Ask the Lord what your life would look like if you were to live out His righteousness every day. What would need to change in your thinking, your heart, your actions, and your relationships? Identify one or two things for each below.

Your Lord?

Your family?

Your friends and neighbors?

Your church family?

Your co-workers?

3. Jesus came to fulfill the law. We could never fulfill the law on our own, but it is credited to us when we trust Christ. In Christ, we can be instruments of righteousness that glorify God as we follow Him in obedience.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. (Jn. 14:12)

What works do you long for the Lord to do through you, that all who see will marvel at *Him*?

Ask the Lord for His grace to hear the truth, receive it, believe it, and obey it. Believe that you are in Christ and that the Spirit of Christ is in you. You have the gift of His power to walk in the truth. In what area of your life do you most need His help to trust, obey and walk forward in righteousness?

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

From today's texts, choose one Scripture 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, your death with Christ, His life 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.

Day Five



QUIET MOMENT

For another perspective on love and righteousness, let us take a quick look at what James has to say:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. (Jas. 2:8-12)

Who is your neighbor? Do you favor one and not another?

What does Jesus say in verse 10?

The Word of God is such a high standard! The Bible teaches us that apart from God we have no ability to keep His Word (Jn. 15:4-5). However, we can be comforted for two reasons: 1) Christ has already perfectly kept the law for us and 2) He has given us the grace to live according to His standard. Love is the fulfillment of the law. God is love. We have been given the Holy Spirit. The Beatitudes explain that those who are poor in spirit—those who are willingly acknowledge and confess our inability to obey—have hope! Christ is our hope. We have been given His love and His power. In your weakness look to Jesus. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1) This truth is vitally important so that we can study the Sermon on the Mount without feeling attacked. We want to be able to face our indwelling sin without fear of condemnation and look to Christ for His grace and mercy to help us overcome! We all are prone to showing partiality, to loving the loveable, but when we find ourselves feeling discouraged and overwhelmed by our sinfulness, let us remember Christ.

GOING DEEPER

1. Partiality is showing favor to one but not another. Is it just one form of hypocrisy, saying one thing but doing another. Hypocrites put on a show for others to see; they focus on external self-righteousness while ignoring the condition of the heart within.

The love of Christ loves without partiality. So much of the world around is built on superficiality, facades, and lies. We want to live and love like Jesus. As you read, write the following verses out word for word.

Romans 13:8-10

2. As you begin this study, take time to write a brief letter to the Lord. Share your heart with Him. Let Him know how you feel. Are you feel overwhelmed, apathetic, or hypocritical? Share with Him if you think that He is asking too much, or even, if you think this study is asking too much. Talk openly with Him about the areas in your life that you know are not what they should be. Jesus is your friend, your advocate, and your strong right hand. Share what you write with your small group, your spouse, or with a friend. Sharing with others might help someone else not feel alone and come to a better understanding of challenges they face in their life and in their relationship with the Lord. Ask the Lord to grow you in righteousness and to give you the grace to be genuine with Him and with others.

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

From today's texts, choose one Scripture 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, your death with Christ, His life 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.

Day Six



Bring the Truth to Life

*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 Peter 3:18

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back

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

STEP ONE: Take the Truth to Heart

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

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

STEP TWO: Put the Flesh to Death

What sin (ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) does this Scripture convict you of? Confess this in writing, including an example of where you recognized 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 what old thinking, belief, attitude, or behavior do you need to repent in order to submit to God and apply His truth to your mind and heart (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5-9)?

STEP THREE: Bring 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, your death with Christ, His life 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.

Bring the Truth to Life Guide

1

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2

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3

Step One

*Take the Truth
to Heart*

Step Two

*Put the Flesh
to Death*

Step Three

*Bring the Truth
to Life*

NAME	SCRIPTURE	SIN	ACTION



Jesus, I Want to Love You

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

This study follows *Jesus, I Need You* and is based in the first seven chapters of Matthew, focusing primarily on the Sermon on the Mount. We are commanded in God's Word to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Many Christians long for their love for the Lord to grow. They want an intimate, vibrant, and dynamic relationship with Christ that transforms the way they think and act and respond to their world. In this study, participants will learn how to love Jesus and follow Him fully in each and every area of their lives. They will be encouraged to continue to put aside the demands of the world and sit at the feet of our Savior and teacher so they might truly hear His message and be drawn into a radical love relationship with Him. Eight lessons (nine weeks with Introduction).

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participant surveys as the
most effective, heart-
transforming Bible studies
they have ever done.*

*Much more than a Bible
study. It's life-altering. It's
practical, biblical mentoring
and discipleship focused on
Taking the Gospel to Heart
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