

SAMPLE LESSON  
NOT FOR RESALE

# Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY



*Focus Scripture*

PSALM 63

# Helpful Information

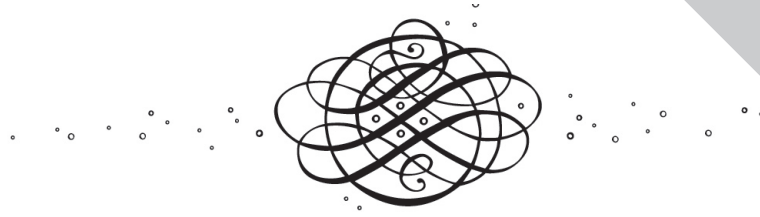
We appreciate your interest in Thistlebend!

Please note that all our studies begin with a “Welcome” section providing an overview of how Thistlebend Discipleship Bible studies are structured. We invite you to view the “Welcome” section and additional sample lessons, which are also available to download.

If you have any questions or requests, please fill out the form on our website or email us at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org).

We look forward to serving you,  
The Thistlebend Team





SAMPLE LESSON  
NOT FOR RESALE

# Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

Focus Scripture: Psalm 63

by Laurie Aker

Contributing Editor

SCOTT KACZOROWSKI

M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctrinal Editor

ED DUNNINGTON

PhD., Covenant Theological Seminary

Editorial Advisor

HEATH LAMBERT

PhD., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

**Editors:**

Laura-Lee Alford

Julie Gibson

Anna Koke

Amy Page

Susan Sampson

Hope Walrad

A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

**Falling in Love Again with Your Lord**

Copyright © 2023, 2021, 2019, 2017, 2016, 2007 by Laurie Aker

Thistlebend Cottage Press

2212 Lakeland Road

Louisville, Kentucky 40223

All rights reserved. No part of this study guide may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher or by U.S.A. copyright law.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise identified, are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

Scripture quotations identified KJV are taken from the King James Version, public domain.

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

Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org))

Scripture quotations identified (NRSV) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. ([www.nsrvbibles.org](http://www.nsrvbibles.org))

Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*, Copyright© 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Text taken from *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, Copyright © 1975 by Arthur Bennett, Used by permission of The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA, All rights reserved worldwide.

Printed in the United States of America.

Thistlebend Ministries  
P.O. Box 23524, Louisville, KY 40223  
11405 Park Road KY 40223  
502-216-4599  
[www.thistlebend.org](http://www.thistlebend.org)  
[info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org)

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.



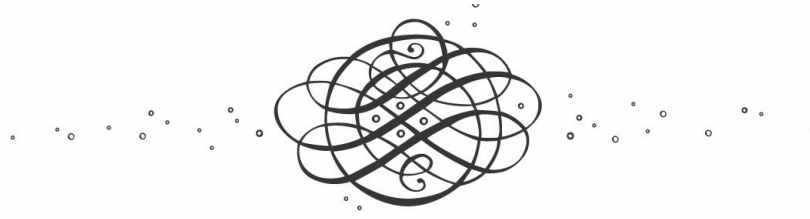
# Table of Contents

WELCOME: Getting Started	i
LESSON ONE: O God, You Are My God	1
LESSON TWO: Earnestly I Seek You	25
LESSON THREE: My Soul Thirsts for You	51
LESSON FOUR: Your Power and Glory	73
LESSON FIVE: Your Lovingkindness	93
LESSON SIX: My Soul Is Satisfied	115
LESSON SEVEN: In the Shadow of Your Wings	137
LESSON EIGHT: Your Right Hand Upholds Me	159
APPENDIX:	A1
Notes	A3
Endnotes	A21
Audio/Video Passwords	A24

A decorative rectangular box with a double-line border. The background of the box features a repeating floral pattern in shades of beige and light blue. The text is centered within this box.

### An Important Note:

Information about our lecture audios and videos,  
including their online passwords, can be found on the  
last page of this workbook.



# 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. Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner commends, “*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 we ask may differ from other Bible studies on the same subject. Nevertheless, women participating in Thistlebend studies often share that 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 lesson where we ask women to “Take the Truth to Heart” and “Bring the Truth 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







# 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 sat St. Anne's Church, a small rustic chapel constructed in the 1800s of large sea-washed stones from the gulf. On my right, at the mouth of Kennebunk River, the outdoor Seaside Chapel gazes into the Atlantic. Waves were crashing below me, exploding on the rocks. Ocean spray burst upwards like fireworks on a Fourth of July night. A perfectly clear blue sky extended above me. Feathery wisps of clouds stretching across the vast canopy contrasted the jagged edge of Maine's rocky coast. The scene's grandeur humbled me and brought a new 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 favorite 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)*

After praying these verses, I looked up and saw a large schooner gracefully piercing the waves, heading into the harbor. The sun was now high in the sky. Along the shore strolled an older couple. As they approached the water's edge, they stopped to take in the picturesque scene. They stood motionless for a while, mesmerized. Then, they turned to look at each other, kissed, and returned their attention



to the view. It was a beautiful picture of the shared love and tenderness that exists within a deep and abiding relationship. It was also a glimpse of the sweet, intimate fellowship the Lord desires with His people like I was experiencing with Him that morning. At that moment on the gulf, the Lord was answering my ongoing plea to know Him more fully. I remembered the passage that I read of Moses' desire earlier that day in my morning devotions.

*Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 19 And He 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 the sovereign grace and mercy that He extends to those He calls to Himself. I pondered the truth of God's Word and His faithfulness. He is the God who answers our prayers in ways far beyond our expectations. I journaled a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. As I finished, I saw a stone wedged deep into a rocky crevice by my side. The flat skipping stone had taken 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 this souvenir of my tender moment with the Lord in my pocket.

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. Our God is so magnificent, holy, and mighty, yet He is willing to meet with us, as small, sinful, and weak as we are. He hears our prayers and answers the cries of our hearts, calling us to enter into a deep and abiding relationship with Him. Intimate. Loving. Life-giving. Life-changing. Our Beloved invites us to communion with Him, like the lover in Solomon's Song.

*"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.'" (Sg. 2:10-13 NRSV)*



Some interpret the Song as written expressly about the romantic relationship between a husband and wife. Given that marriage pictures the relationship of Christ and the church, the Song's significance expands for New Testament believers. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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). This describes not romantic infatuation but true, abiding love from a passionate God who loves His people intimately.

It is awe-inspiring to contemplate that God Most High, Creator of the universe, extends an invitation to us to enter into an intimate and loving relationship with Him. Modern theologian R.C. Sproul compels us to consider our great and mighty God: "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."<sup>2</sup> 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).

What could we desire more than an intimate, deeply devoted, and loving relationship with God? This holy and loving God, who has unfathomable power and wisdom to create the universe from nothing, desires a relationship with us! He greatly rejoices over His people (Zep. 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 wants the devotion and companionship of His bride, the church. He will glorify Himself in and through us as we fully delight in Him. *"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved'"* (Rom. 9:25). The Lord seeks us earnestly. We want to seek Him earnestly. Let us respond gratefully to His tender invitation to join in His love, saying in our hearts and with our lives, *"My beloved is mine, and I am his"* (Sg. 2:16).

So, how do we enter into His love? How does a relationship with God Most High develop, and what is our part? How do we relate to the Creator of the universe—the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the almighty One who is holy and worthy of all our worship and praise? You might wonder, "How can this God who is so holy, so magnificent, and so mighty desire a relationship with someone as lowly as me?" Furthermore, you may wonder if having a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord is



possible, especially if you perceive a chasm too vast to bridge between His divinity and your humanity, separating you from Him. As believers, we still contemplate and struggle with such thoughts.

The aim of this study is to explore these questions and learn to fall in love again with our Lord—or to fall in love with Him for the first time. Of course, the expression “falling in love” is merely an idiom summarizing a heartfelt desire to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as He commands (Dt. 6:5, Mk. 12:30). If we love God fully, it will impact every relationship in our lives—we will love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39). As followers of Christ, we want to know His love and walk in close fellowship with Him. Still, often, our spiritual eyes strain to see Him. We are uncertain of how to love and seek Him when we cannot see Him. We fail to comprehend His boundless, unconditional love. We struggle to believe His Word and walk with Him by His grace. We may know that an intimate relationship with the Lord is possible, but we have been discouraged in our attempts to attain it. Perhaps we have experienced this relationship in part but desire to know Him more.

Be encouraged! In this study, we will focus on our relationship with the Lord and immerse ourselves in His Word, to know Him, love Him, and follow Him more than ever before. David’s prayer in Psalm 63 will be our guide to examine and emulate David’s relationship with the Lord. Throughout this study, we will continually ask the Lord to reveal Himself and teach us about the enduring relationship He desires to have with us. We will learn how to obediently and earnestly follow Him by His grace.

As we embark on our journey of falling in love again with the Lord, we must begin with the gospel, God’s ultimate act of love through Jesus Christ. His love is the source of our salvation and the very root of our relationship with Him. What do we mean when we talk about the gospel? Let us take a moment to speak the gospel to our hearts prayerfully.

God, the Lord of all and Creator of all, has given us all things; therefore, we owe Him all things. Humankind was created good but fell prey to temptation and sinned against God, bringing sin and death into the world. In merciful love and grace, God made a way to rescue us from hell and restore us to Himself. He responded to our rebellion by sending His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, bore the wrath we sinners deserved, died in our place, and rose again, overcoming sin and death. Jesus now reigns in heaven over all, and salvation comes through Him alone.

Contemplate this astounding exchange: Jesus took our sin and unrighteousness upon Himself on the cross and gave us His righteousness in return (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of His death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sin and eternal life are available to all who put their faith in Christ by God’s grace. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people”* (Ti. 2:11). If we



believe in Christ and trust Him alone as our Savior, then God forgives all our sin, declares us righteous in Christ, adopts us as His own, and gives us every spiritual blessing (Eph.1:3-6).

As demonstrated in the gospel, God's love is essential and foundational to every part of our life in relationship with Him. The Bible tells us God is love (1 Jn. 4:7-8, 16). If God Himself is love, then He is our example and standard for love and our source of love. Do you know this love? Are you walking in the reality of God's love for you? Not only do we want to know His love and live in His love, but also we want to love Him back as He has loved us.

With these truths in mind, I would love to share a bit of my story. Every Sunday morning, I looked forward to going to church. I sang every hymn with fervor and knew every liturgical prayer and response almost by heart. At fifteen, I joined the adult choir, riding four miles on my bicycle to the weeknight practices. However, I paid little attention to Jesus or His relevance to my daily life.

In my mid-twenties, my salvation experience instantly transformed my life. My husband, Kevin, was out of town on business, and I was home alone caring for our six-month-old daughter. My mom came for a visit to help me and celebrate my birthday. On Saturday afternoon, while running errands together, we shared a heart-to-heart conversation. I admitted that although Kevin and I were going to church, Sundays felt like they demanded too much effort because the church service seemed like an empty ritual. I had to drag myself out of bed and make myself go. I knew attending was an essential part of a relationship with God, so I wanted it to be much more than a hollow routine; I wanted to *want* to go to church—something was missing in my heart. My mom mentioned a church in the area that she thought I might like, and we went together the following morning. Unknowingly, we had the wrong time and arrived late. The service was well underway, so we stood quietly in the door.

Something life-changing and heart-altering occurred. In what seemed like only a fraction of a second my eyes were opened! I had been “blind,” but then I could “see.” It was not something that someone said or did in the service. It was not something I did. It was none other than God the Holy Spirit moving in my heart. In that instant, I understood that Jesus was not merely a good man who died two thousand years ago, but that He was the Son of God who rose again and now lives and reigns 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. All the things I had heard growing up in church raced 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, by taking upon Himself the punishment we deserved. He was crucified, but then He rose again. The pieces were fitting together in



a new and personal way. I saw that Jesus was alive and I could have a relationship with Him! Jesus was *my* Savior. Jesus bore *my* sins. Jesus was crucified on *my* behalf. I was transported to a new reality.

Oddly, I do not 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 could not 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 my gratitude for His grace compelled me. I fervently sought to grow in Christ however I could, pursuing every possible avenue to do just that. I volunteered on committees, participated in Bible studies, prayed, sang hymns, journaled, and volunteered more. I could not 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 pursuit for God continued. Along the way, the Lord led us to a new church. We rejoiced to hear the gospel preached more clearly and to participate in more Bible studies, however, at the same time, something was not quite right. Christian fellowship was difficult to find. No one I encountered talked about things beneath the surface—like their heart attitudes, thought life, weaknesses—let alone their sins and failures. As a young believer, I did not understand what I was encountering. Looking back, I realized that the lies of legalism were taking control. Women felt they had to cover the “bad,” they had to have it all together because “good” Christians do not have those sorts of problems.

Inwardly, I wondered, “Am I the only one who struggles with ungodly thoughts, sins, and weaknesses? Is there something wrong with me?” I went to an older, godly woman in our church to ask for help. She told me, “Go home. Love your husband and your children.” The problem was that I did not know how.

A feeling of isolation crept in, taking a toll on my heart. The daily demands of life with four active children, a highly focused husband with a very demanding job, and ongoing extended family crises just added to my growing feelings of inadequacy coupled with the pain of loneliness and isolation. I was stretched thin, growing weary, running on empty, and I did not know what to do. All of the pain and pressure was more than I could face, so I just steeled my resolve and focused on carrying on. My feelings for the Lord were strong but my faith was weak.

I realize now that I did not know how to live in the blessings that God had given to me in Christ. I did not know how to put my flesh to death, put my hope in God, and walk forward in the Spirit by grace through faith. When we come to Christ, God gives us every spiritual blessing. Growing



in the Christian life is a process of learning to use all these treasures God has given us in Christ. Early in my walk of faith, I had little idea of how to do so!

This is a good place to pause my story. You may identify with some or all of what I have shared. Perhaps you have followed the Lord faithfully but you still long for more of Him. Countless men and women are in the same place I was. For many, it is not so much that we have lost our grip on God's promises; it is that we have never learned how to integrate the truths into our hearts and apply them to our core beliefs.

Take a moment to think through what you have read today. Think about your story. What has transpired along your journey with the Lord? What key memories and landmarks come to mind? Journal your thoughts and observations below (or in a separate journal). Note your struggles, failures, and expectations, etc.

Close your time with the Lord in prayer. I am praying that your time in God's Word during this study will strengthen your faith in the power of the gospel and God's love for you. What is more, may it deepen your love for the Lord and establish an intimate relationship with Him. 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 repentance to confess and forsake all else to seek your face humbly and love you above all.

In Jesus' name, I pray,  
Amen.





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

## D A Y T W O

**Opening Reflection:** Observe how David describes His relationship with God in Psalm 63. Listen to his heart. Write your own brief prayer below each verse, expressing your heart's response to each one.

### **Psalm 63:1-8**

- 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 [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.*

Now, 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 above and write the chapter number above it. This will help you see the overall structure of the study.



In Psalm 63:1, David proclaims, “O God, you are my God.” We want to declare 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—determines our deeds, because our doctrine is derived from what we saturate ourselves in, whether it is 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 Lord calls us to be zealous in our love for Him, for His Word, and for good deeds, all for His pleasure and His glory. If we love Him with our all, we will embrace His Word, and we will obey Him (Jn. 14:15). God will be our God. May He make this so.



I would like to ask you to take a brief spiritual inventory to prayerfully consider where you are in your walk with the Lord. Reflect on your relationship with Him, where it began, where you have been, where you are now, and where you hope to go. Ask the Spirit to reveal the truth and guide you as you read the following. You are not alone; other saints share some of their struggles, joys, and desires.

I have been in Bible study for over 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. 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 cannot remember ever being any other way, even though we have prayed and tried to change. Unbelief is also the root of sin itself. We sin when we do not believe God's way is best or God's way is true. *Complacency* because family, church, school, and work can take precedence over the Lord. *Competing affections* because many distractions pull our attention away from the Lord—television, sports, hobbies, social media, or social commitments. We tend to prioritize external activities above the inner condition of our hearts.

What describes you or your spiritual condition? Now is the perfect time to openly share your thoughts, questions, and doubts with the Lord. Ask Him for His wisdom, help, mercy, and grace to identify false beliefs and competing values that hinder your growth in 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? If so, of what?

Are you anxious about anything? What stirs anxiety?

Do you feel all alone or let down?

Do you think you know the Lord well and do not need more Bible study or accountability?

Have things in your life or in the lives of your loved ones 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 or emotionally exhausted?

Do you find yourself comparing?

Have you been hurt, rejected, overlooked, or misjudged?

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

When are you the happiest?

When are you the most angry?

Other?

### TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Meditate upon this Scripture today. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out. Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you.

*Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.*



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

## D A Y T H R E E

**Opening Reflection:** God calls His people by name; we are His beloved. When the Holy Spirit quickens our hearts, bringing us from death to life, and we trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become children of God. He becomes our Father and our God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul breaks into praise as he considers all that God has done and all that God has given to us in Christ as His beloved children. The Father chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. He has predestined us to be His adopted sons and daughters, and He has given us an abundant, eternal inheritance from His endless heavenly riches. He has set us apart for His glory and purpose, giving us everything we need. Read the following passage and record what it says about who we are in Christ.

### **Ephesians 1:1-14**



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), the blood of Jesus Christ. He laid down His sinless life to redeem sinners from worthless, worldly, and wanton living, “*to purify for himself a people*” who would delight in Him and be “*zealous for good works*” (Ti. 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. The very church that received Paul’s letter, left their first love, and their works revealed their misshapen values. Read the following passage from Revelation. List some of their wrong values.

### **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 calling to both believers and unbelievers in the congregation at Ephesus<sup>3</sup> to examine their hearts because there is evidence of *unrepentant* sin among them. They may have thought they forsook everything else, but these verses show us that rivals had displaced Jesus from holding first place in their hearts. Jesus was no longer their supreme love, and as a result, they faced grave danger.

Some tremble when reading Jesus' strong warning to the Ephesian church that He would come and remove their lampstand, indicating that they would lose their status as a church, if they did not repent. Does that mean believers do not sin, or 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 Holy Spirit-conviction of sin and the habit of repentance. As we repent, we bear evidence that we are in fact His alone. Christ rules, directs, protects, and keeps His own: we cannot lose our eternal salvation in Him! Ponder these powerful truths. Is there anything you need to share with the Lord? Anything you need to confess? Review the following list. It may be helpful in pinpointing areas submitted to rival mastery and not Jesus' Lordship. Mark any that might be true of you and bring them before the Lord in confession.

Is there anyone you have not 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 or need to have everything under control?

Do you like to be in control and struggle when you are 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 do not 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?

Do you find yourself looking for relief or pleasure in someone or something other than Christ?

What has not been mentioned that may be in the back of your mind?

What other areas of life might the Spirit bring to mind?



We want to take a moment to slow down, even stop to think through who or what we worship. Reflect upon the questions you have just answered. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see and grant you grace to respond truthfully without fear to the following questions. Who or what is on the throne of your heart? Is God your God? Your everything? Do you love Him as He desires? Do you desire your relationship with Him to be deep and abiding? 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 necessary work in your heart? Such change may seem impossible, but because of God's amazing grace, it is not only possible, but it is what God made us for. Romans 5:8 assures us, "*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 the Triune God—Father, Son and Spirit—loves 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, take a moment to summarize what the Lord has shown you. Ask Him for His grace to proceed in this study with humility, joy, hope, and a tender heart that desires Him above all else.

### TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Meditate upon this Scripture today. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out. Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you.

*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

**Opening Reflection:** Before we immerse ourselves specifically in Psalm 63 and learn to earnestly seek after the Lord, let us come to the Lord as our Shepherd. A shepherd's job is to provide and care for his flock as he guides them to good pastures with plenty of food and water. We are not on this journey alone, our Lord will tenderly lead us and show us the way. He stands with His arms open wide. The care of our Shepherd frees us from fear to rest in His love, "*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*" (1 Jn. 4:18). Throughout the lesson, do not hesitate to call on the Lord to meet you where you are and provide all that you truly need, even a heart of repentance. If you do not truly know Him as your personal Lord and Savior, may you come to know His love through Jesus Christ. He is waiting for you with His arms open wide. For those who have known the Lord and experienced His love, He still invites you into a deeper relationship with Him. If we want to truly "fall in love with Him," we must rid ourselves of anything that holds us back from giving Him our all. Love is a deliberate act of cherishing someone or anything more than yourself.

Today, we will focus on Psalm 23 to see God as our gentle, loving Shepherd. Read Psalm 23 slowly and note what the psalmist says about God.

### Psalm 23

- 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) David was a good shepherd. He knew from his experience the tender affection and care a shepherd has towards his flock. He understood what his sheep needed and what a blessing it was to them to have a wise, kind, and devoted leader who was willing to risk his life to protect his flock. David once risked his life to rescue one of his own. Jesus, 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. Answer the following questions.

Make a list of the attributes of a good shepherd.

How does the Lord shepherd us?

If the Lord is our Shepherd and we are His sheep, does this impact how you respond to Him?

In what ways do you need the Lord to help you trust Him more as your Shepherd?



### Restorer of Souls

*He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* (Ps. 23:3) 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 our Shepherd watches attentively over His sheep and restores them to Himself when they wander. As we grow in Christ, we learn increasingly 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 reveal where you might be weary, struggling, or wandering. Confess in faith believing that He forgives.

Lord, I confess . . .



Read the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Ask the Spirit to bear this fruit in your life. Trust Him to restore you and lead you on the right path. Ask the Spirit to help you see where you need to grow. Write your observations next to each.

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. In Christ, we have been delivered from death and its sting. But walking through this valley of the shadow of death can still feel very treacherous at times. Grief and fear can seem to swallow us, shadows can surround us without and overwhelm us within. But these valleys are fruitful, just as David implies in Psalm 63. We can come to know beauty in the dark and dangerous times, learning to walk through them with our eyes upon God and His glory. Note, too, the walk progresses *through* the valley of the shadow of death; we will not be lost in this valley. Our Shepherd promises, *"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? Follow Him through the valley; there is much to see and learn. What are some of the deep, dark valleys the Lord has walked you through? Are you in one today?

How have you seen God's faithfulness?

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, and more than full. In Christ, we possess that overflowing cup. God has given us everything we need and more. His abundant lovingkindness provides sufficiently for all our needs in life and godliness. As our protector, He anoints our heads with

oil (c.f. Eccl. 9:7-8, Lk. 7:46). Although David appears to switch imagery from a shepherd and sheep to a banquet, it is interesting to note that the anointing imagery still applied well to the shepherd and sheep relationship. In the ancient Near East, a shepherd cared for his sheep individually. During certain seasons, the sheep would be afflicted by flies, mosquitos, fleas, ticks, and other insects. The pests 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, the shepherd would make a mixture with olive oil and anoint the head of the sheep, rubbing the oil into its wool especially around its nose, eyes, and ears.<sup>4</sup> As Christians we may be able to avoid the larger 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 by people.<sup>5</sup>

Where do you need healing and help from the Shepherd of your soul?



Remember, the Lord 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.

### TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Meditate upon this Scripture today. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out. Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you.

*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

**Opening Reflection:** Over 3,000 years ago, God’s spokesperson, Moses, proclaimed this divine imperative: “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” (Dt. 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). Today God’s Word still speaks to us.

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, 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 are not capable of truly loving anyone, let alone God. The good news of the gospel is that we *are* able to have a personal, 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 seek after Him in a single-minded, wholly devoted pursuit. As we ask, He will answer; as we seek, He will make Himself known; as we knock, He will open the gateway into a deepening love relationship with Him. Write God’s divine imperative below from Deuteronomy, word for word.

### Deuteronomy 6:4-5

What does Jesus add in Mark 12:30?



As we pursue a deep and abiding love relationship 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 talked with God moment-by-moment, and the Lord inspired many of his heartfelt prayers to teach us through the Psalms. David’s relationship with God is a model of walking with Almighty God, with our hearts knit together in a real and often raw relationship. In his psalms, David opens a door for us to enter the secret place of his unguarded, intimate dialogue with God Most High.

In the psalms we learn how David entrusted everything to God—his life and his heart. Psalm 63 poignantly describes how God worked in my heart as I sought after Him and cried out to Him to be my God. Ponder what this psalm says about God’s character and actions. God can do the same for you; seek after Him, asking Him to make the statements in this psalm true of you. Over the next few weeks, we will be studying, praying through, meditating on, and memorizing Psalm 63. Each week, we will explore one or two verses 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 anything that speaks to your heart. Using the words you marked, write your own heart cry to the Lord in the space provided. This is the relationship we want to have with the Lord. Make Psalm 63 your prayer.

### **Psalm 63:1-8**

- 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.*



There is nothing the Lord Jesus wants more than for us to truly know Him, deeply love Him, and intimately enjoy Him all the more. When this is a reality we will glorify Him. This will not happen overnight, but it is developed over time as we passionately pursue the Lord and consistently invest ourselves in daily devotion to Him. The Lord Jesus set the example for us in meeting with His Father daily for fellowship and guidance.

Remember however, there is nothing the enemy, the Devil, wants to do more than prevent us from pursuing the Lord 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 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. 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"* (Sg. 2:10-13).

In anticipation of the remainder of the study, I would like to ask you to write out a prayer, in light of all you have read and reflected upon this week, in the space below. You may want to consider using Psalm 23 and Psalm 63 to help. Ask the Lord to grant you His grace that enables you to earnestly seek after Him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

### TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Meditate upon this Scripture today. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out. Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you.

*Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.*



# Bring the Truth 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 Pt. 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. Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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



## **STEP TWO: Put 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 chose. 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.

Meditate upon this Scripture today. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out. Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you.

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



## Bring the Truth to Life Chart

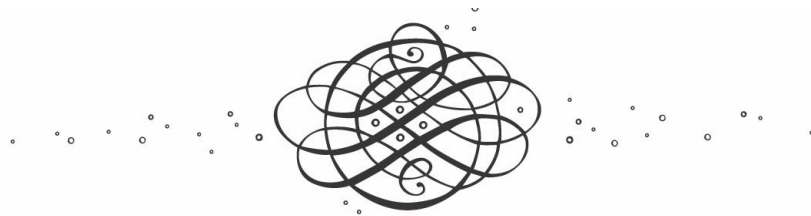
This chart is to be filled out on class day.

*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	<b>Step One</b> TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART <b>SCRIPTURE</b>	<b>Step Two</b> PUT THE FLESH TO DEATH <b>SIN</b>	<b>Step Three</b> BRING THE TRUTH TO LIFE <b>ACTION</b>
------	---	--	--



# Earnestly I Seek You

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you.* (Ps. 63:1a)

**G**od Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, has a love for us that our hearts will never fully grasp on this side of heaven. It is a love that surpasses human comprehension. God has created within us a deep need for Him and His love. In our quest to fulfill that need, we often chase after everything but Him, filling that place with cheap substitutes and defiling what was meant only for Him. We become pacified for the moment, deceptively full but hopelessly unsatisfied. If we do not seek after Him—if He is not our sole pursuit—we can find ourselves lonely and isolated. We are left longing and empty yet again. The truth is, we are unable to absorb God's love apart from God Himself opening our hearts and our minds to Him. He promises in His Word, *"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart"* (Jer. 29:13). God wants us to find our very purpose and fulfillment in Him, for we were made to glorify Him and enjoy Him fully. David makes this his holy ambition, proclaiming from the depths of his soul, *"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you"* (Ps. 63:1a). May this be our holy ambition!

Ask yourself, "Is God, my God? Do I believe that He is God Most High, worthy of all of my worship and praise? Do I believe He will meet me right where I am, satisfy my deepest longings, and bring me into the holy, intimate, love relationship for which I was created?" These are critical questions. Take a moment to consider them. As you reflect, you do not have to have all the answers, but jot down your thoughts in the margin. Share them with the Lord. Believe that He will meet you right where you are and help you earnestly seek Him. We want to seek God as David describes and follow our Shepherd in His Word. This is essential, because if we are not careful, we can find ourselves on a misguided course heading toward the wrong destination. The only path to pursue God is by His grace through His Word. The Son Himself is the Word! *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (Jn. 1:1). God's Word is truth, Spirit, and life (Jn. 6:33). We are not alone in this pursuit because the Father and Son have sent us the Spirit.



*“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:13-15).*

We pursue a loving and intimate relationship with God by spending time with Him—reading, meditating on, praying through, and obeying His Word. Paul says that all of our prayers must be continual and come from a heart full of gratitude (1 Thes. 5:17, Phil. 4:6, Col. 4:2). And obedience to God’s Word is the mark of those who truly love God (Jn. 14:24-25). As we draw near to God in this way, He draws near to us. He keeps us in close communion with Him, and we come to know Him more and more. We are enabled by grace through faith to press on in the face of difficulty believing that He will accomplish His work in our lives. Without faith, we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). It is important to keep in mind that our earnest efforts may or may not produce the results we desire. We must wait on God. He is the One who causes the growth in His time and in His way (1 Cor. 3:7) as we diligently pursue Him.

Be prepared, those who resolve to earnestly seek God will encounter resistance. We can lose step with the Lord, be detoured, and even delayed by various distractions from within and without. Listen to Christian’s exhortation in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, “Let nothing that is on this side of eternal life get inside you. Above all, take care of your own hearts, and resist the lusts that tempt you, for your hearts ‘are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.’ Set your faces like a flint; you have all the power of Heaven and earth on your side.”<sup>1</sup> We must guard against our sinful default responses and habits that hinder our spiritual growth: misplaced trust, misguided ambition, and misaligned priorities.

**Misplaced trust** hinders our pursuit and growth. Without realizing it, we put our trust in our perspective, our feelings, or our way of doing things rather than the Word and promises of God. We may know His Word well and still not live according to it. We lean on our understanding rather than trusting the Lord wholeheartedly, demonstrating our unbelief in our disobedience. God repeatedly promises that He will provide all our needs (Phil. 4:19, Mt. 6:25-34, 2 Cor. 9:8). Yet, when we face suffering—our husband loses his job, our daughter’s test score indicates she has a learning disability, a friend betrays our trust, or we simply get a flat tire—we panic. Anxious thoughts and feelings flood our minds: “God has forgotten me. God doesn’t love me. I am all alone!”

What is more, we put trust in our own power. Years ago, I fervently tried to seek the Lord, but a barrier blocked my way. I was afraid to look at my sin because I could not fathom that anyone could change my heart, not even God. I had confessed my sins so many times, and I thought, “No one else is



a sinner like me!” Hiding and repressing it was the only thing I knew to do while I tried harder and harder to be good. All the effort in the world would not wash away my sin and transform my heart. If we seek God in our own strength, we are sure to fail. If righteousness was achievable by good works or excellent performance, Christ’s suffering and death was unnecessary. My trust was not in the Lord; it was in myself. We are exhorted in Proverbs 3:5-7, “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.*” My misguided trust had detoured me and imprisoned me for decades.

**Misguided ambition** seduces us and detours us far off course. We must ask ourselves why we do not fervently pursue the Lord. What are we striving for? We cannot pursue two opposing goals. What is competing for the affection of our hearts? Is it self-approval, control, human relationships, financial security, health, or success? Why do we compare ourselves to others? We ought to probe our hearts with questions that will unearth our idols, such as, “Why do I compare myself to that other woman? Am I looking for self-approval? Or do I want to appear superior and attractive to people around me? Do I want the attention of the guy who is interested in her? Do I want reassurance from her praise because I respect her?” Our desires drive our actions, and we must consciously choose to cherish Christ instead of ambitiously chasing the temporal things of this world.

**Misaligned priorities** divide our hearts and keep us from seeking God wholeheartedly. We consciously (or unconsciously) “put God in His place” and marginalize Him, making Him just a part of our lives instead of the *LORD* of our lives. We sideline Him and turn what was meant to be a relationship into a list of rules, an acquisition of knowledge, a life philosophy, or even membership in a heavenly club. When we make God a means to an end, other things in our lives become unbalanced. Hidden idols in our hearts distract us. But when our love relationship with the Lord is central, the eyes of our hearts are fixed on Him, and all else will fall into its rightful place.

Discerning our misplaced trust, misguided ambition, and misaligned priorities can be difficult. Scripture commands that we examine ourselves, yet we do not want to assess our spiritual condition without the Lord’s help. We must humbly bring our questions to Him and rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal truth. Let us draw near to God and ask Him to knit our hearts to His. He will mold us and shape us as we keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

The Lord is presiding over every step of our journey. The more we get to know Him, the more He may surprise us. He is more loving, caring, and present than we could ever imagine. His plans exceed our own; God’s ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8), and He works all things together for our good



# Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY

*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. Psalm 63:1*

So many Christian women today long to know and love the Lord but don't know how. In this discipleship study, women are taught from God's word what it really means to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. As they journey through David's Psalm 63, women will experience the kind of thirst-quenching relationship the Lord desires to have with them. Many women from many different backgrounds and churches have experienced radical heart and life transformation through this study. Falling In Love Again With Your Lord is, in the words of Dr. Heath Lambert, "robustly biblical, incredibly practical, and urgently needed." Eight lessons (nine weeks with Introduction).

THISTLEBEND BIBLE STUDIES  
*are consistently cited in  
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  
and Bringing It to Life.*

**THISTLEBEND**  
MINISTRIES

*Taking the Gospel to Heart and Bringing It to Life*