

# Hello and Welcome!

Please take a moment to read  
this important note  
before you explore this book preview.



We all go through different stages of study and quiet time spent with the Lord—and at times we need “interval training!” The content in all Thistlebend studies is designed for the user to choose the amount of time she can spend on her study each day. So whether you are looking to spend 20 minutes each day in your study or an hour, these studies will meet you where you are. Our goal is to help you develop a pattern and discipline for spending time with the Lord each day in His Word and in prayer, regardless of the amount of time, trusting the Lord will speak to your heart and guide you and grow you in every stage. Additional information about this and more can be found in the Welcome section of this book. Contact us at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org) with any questions!

**Thank you for previewing this book!**

Heart of a Woman  
*A Thistlebend Discipleship Study*



*Focus Scripture*  
THE PSALMS

**THE PASSWORDS FOR THE COMPANION  
AUDIO/VIDEO RESOURCES ARE LOCATED  
ON THE LAST PAGE OF THIS STUDY.**

# Heart of a Woman

*Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24*

by Laurie Aker

## In Pursuit of Spirit-filled Hearts

Even a child makes himself known by his acts,  
by whether his conduct is pure and upright.

Prov. 20:11

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against  
the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,  
being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

2 Cor. 10:5-6

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

Prov. 4:23



**A Thistlebend Discipleship Bible Study**

## Heart of a Woman

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24

Copyright © 2017, 2016, 2012 by Laurie Aker

Published by:  
Thistlebend Cottage Press  
2212 Lakeland Road  
Louisville, Kentucky 40223

Printed in the United States of America

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.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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 marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2007, 2013, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

THISTLEBEND MINISTRIES  
P.O. Box 23524, Louisville, KY 40223  
307 Townepark Circle, Louisville, KY 40243  
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.

## Editors

Hope Walrad

Rev. Edward Morris, M.Div., doctrinal editor  
Rev. Scott Kaczorowski, M.Div., doctrinal editor

# Contents

## W E L C O M E

Important Information to Review Before Beginning

i

## L E S S O N O N E

Planted by Streams of Water

I

## L E S S O N T W O

Preparing to Ask God to Search Your Heart

25

## L E S S O N T H R E E

I Bow My Knees Before the Father

47

## L E S S O N F O U R

Ask the Father in My Name

69

## L E S S O N F I V E

A Holy Fast: Fasting to Feast

91

## L E S S O N S I X

Repentance: A Posture of Humility

111

## L E S S O N S E V E N

A Victory Garden: Planting Righteousness

131

## L E S S O N E I G H T

A Fruitful Harvest: Ongoing Weeding and Planting

153

## A P P E N D I X

Sample trees of unrighteousness and righteousness, tools, endnotes

A1

## B O N U S S E C T I O N

Additional trees and lecture notes

B1



# Welcome!

It is a blessing and an honor that you have chosen to participate in a Thistlebend discipleship Bible study. We are excited for all the Lord has in store for you through this study. We would love to hear from you—send us your stories, comments, and prayer requests! And we welcome your questions or suggestions at any time. We are here to serve and support you in any way possible. You can contact us at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org).

## **Thistlebend Distinctives**

Thistlebend is much more than a Bible study. Our curriculum incorporates mentoring and discipleship components and essentials within the context of a traditional Bible study. These serve to ignite, spur on, and support genuine, sustained heart transformation—by God’s grace!

The foundation and framework and focus of Thistlebend’s curriculum is God’s Word. The mentoring of women and the discipleship of their hearts happens within focused, intensive, biblical study and shepherding.

We exist to support the body of Christ and the local church in our obedience to God’s Word to mentor women (Titus 2:3-5) and to make disciples. Our training equips women to think and respond biblically as they come up under God’s Word and their pastors, husbands, and study leaders. It also provides practical methods to enable women to overcome the temptations of the enemy, obstacles of their flesh, and pressures of social and cultural expectations in order to truly follow Jesus.

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR ALL LEADERS AND PARTICIPANTS TO READ BEFORE BEGINNING THIS STUDY

### I. What to Expect from a Thistlebend Study

S.A.L.T. is the acronym we use that gives a framework for our discipleship studies and is incorporated into all the content we produce. It stands for Submission, Accountability, Laboring, and Transparency. S.A.L.T. discipleship studies provide us with a format to do a careful, in depth study of God's Word and to give the support and encouragement needed for growing and abiding in Christ. Together we will grow to know Jesus more fully and be obedient to Him. If you have never done a Bible study before, do not fret! Studies like these might be unfamiliar or seem intimidating at first, but know that we are all here to learn and grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. So as you go through your workbook, do not be concerned about getting the "right" answers. If you are in a group study, you will likely be reviewing the homework together. Just allow the Lord to speak to you through His Word and mark any questions so you can ask your leaders later. Remember, the Lord meets each of us right where we are.

#### **The Goals of a Thistlebend Study**

To equip and encourage women to:

- Develop an intimate, vibrant, and enduring relationship with Christ.
- Respond biblically to God and His Word.
- Participate in mentoring and discipleship relationships with other women (in their church) who desire to grow deeper in their walk with the Lord.
- Fully engage in their role in sanctification.
- Enter into the joy of absolute surrender and grateful obedience.

#### **How Are These Goals Accomplished?**

- Large Group Mentoring and Discipleship

The large group format allows for all the ladies to be together to hear transparent sharing and teaching from God's Word by the teaching leader. This way of mentoring provides both oversight and accountability

for the small group leaders and participants and helps guard against independent, unbiblical thinking.

- Small Group Mentoring and Discipleship

Small group leaders are not merely facilitators of discussion; they are given tools and training to truly lead. The small group setting allows the small group leader to mentor and disciple women in a more intimate and personal way, helping them to become doers of the Word and not just hearers only. This format provides for more assimilation of the truths of God's Word as the group discusses the large group teaching and reviews the homework. Women are encouraged and equipped to be transformed by the renewing of their minds and to apply the Word of God to their daily lives.

- Smaller Taking the Truth to Heart Group Mentoring and Discipleship

These groups are a critical part of small group discipleship and accountability. We see in Scripture how Jesus disciplined Peter, James, and John in a smaller setting. The even smaller group size (four or less is ideal) allows for more transparent sharing and more intimacy and more opportunity for speaking the truth in love as women learn to apply the gospel to their heart and mind and lives. They come to realize they are not alone in their battles with sin and weakness and that these are the very reason the gospel is necessary—not just for salvation, but for our daily lives.

If you are doing the study as an individual, please feel free to contact us with any questions at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org). More in depth information about our studies and ministry model and methods can be found on our app or on our website at [Thistlebend.org](http://Thistlebend.org). If you have never done a Thistlebend study before, we strongly encourage you to view our Orientation video and read the Introduction to Thistlebend. Both can be found online on our app or on our website. You will benefit more from this study by understanding the mentoring and discipleship principles that are interwoven into all aspects of our curriculum.

## 2. What to Expect on Class Day

### Large Group

- Each week the class will begin with praise and prayer. The teaching leader then will begin the mentoring and teaching lecture time.

### Small Group

- Following the lecture, participants move to their small groups. Small group members, led by the group leader, then discuss the lecture and how the Lord used it to speak to their hearts.
- The small group leader then begins a discussion of the week's homework by reading the main point of the week's homework from the Discussion Questions (which are provided).
- Group members are asked to fill out a Homework Accountability Card (see Exhibit A at the end of this section, on page ix, for an example) to let their leader know how they completed their homework so the leader can help them keep their commitment to the Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment (see Exhibit B, page ix) and assist where they may need help. (These tools and documents are available on our app and on our website on the resources page for *Heart of a Woman*.)
- The small group then together recites the Scripture memory verse(s) for that week.

### Taking the Truth to Heart Group

- After discussing the lecture and homework, group members move into smaller groups, depending on the size of the main small group.
- Each group member will have an opportunity to share from their "Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life" page, which is completed at the end of each lesson on Day Six. To allow time for all women to share, a time limit of three minutes is set for each person. Keeping a strict time limit helps keep the focus on God and His Word, put trust in Him, and rely on His grace. This way, no one person can dominate the group. The purpose of this time is to help teach women not to fix one another, but to learn to confess their sin to one another and fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their

faith. Therefore, each group member simply reads what they have written in their workbook. The other group members record what each woman shares on the Taking the Truth to Heart chart (see Exhibit C, page ix) so they can be praying specifically for one another throughout the week.

- The Taking the Truth to Heart steps will change each week, but by the end of the study, participants will have learned to transparently share with one another the Scripture the Lord is using that week to renew their mind and transform their heart (Rom. 12:2). They will have confessed their sin to one another (James 5:16), and they will have shared how they will work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) in repentance and faith through an action step that they will be working on throughout the coming week (Heb. 12:1-3).
- Group members are continually encouraged to remember God's love through the gospel as they share transparently.

### **What to Bring**

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

## **3. How the S.A.L.T. Discipleship Study Workbook Is Organized**

Each lesson in your workbook contains six days of homework. Homework will take approximately 30 minutes each day.

### **Day One**

- Each lesson begins with a devotion that is meant to give direction for the week and to help prepare our hearts and minds to receive the Lord's teaching throughout the remainder of the week.
- At the close of this day, you will find a Taking the Truth to Heart section where you will be guided step by step each week in the process of having the Lord examine your heart and also learning to observe yourself and apply the Word of God to your heart and life. For *Heart of a Woman*, this is done with the aid of a tree graphic (located at the end of each lesson just before Day Six—see Exhibit D, page ix) that you will fill out each day.

### **Days Two-Five**

- These days will place you in your Bible, where you will read Scripture and be asked questions to help you think according to the Word of God and to have the Lord search your heart.
- You will also be led each day through the Taking the Truth to Heart process according to the steps outlined on Day One of each lesson.
- Each day will include a section to lead you in prayer.
- Regarding homework, you will have an opportunity to discuss your answers when your small group meets. If you're not in a group, feel free to send your questions to [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org).

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

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

## **4. Stay Connected**

Throughout the week, complete your workbook lesson daily. Contact your leader if you have any questions or prayer requests. No question is too insignificant to ask. Also, please come to class each week even if circumstances (like your kids were sick with Strep all week!) kept you from getting all your homework done. It will still bless you!

However, if you need to miss class:

- Please watch or listen to the lecture online. The audio and video lectures are available on our app or online (with free registration) at [thistlebend.org/resources](http://thistlebend.org/resources)
- Notify your small group leader of your absence.
- Send your Taking the Truth to Heart information to your small group leader.

\* All Exhibits are located on page ix.

## A PRAYER OF INTENT

Before beginning this study, please pray through this prayer that beautifully helps set the tone for *Heart of a Woman*. May the Lord tune our hearts to His by His grace.

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

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

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

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

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

We ask that your Spirit would fan the fire of love for You in our hearts. Please don't let us be content with surface level repentance. Let it be deep and let it be real. May we utilize every personal and corporate means of grace at our disposal to love You more. And may our love for You produce a passion to make disciples and proclaim your gospel around this city and around the world. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.<sup>1</sup>

## NOT IN ME

by Eric Schumacher & David L. Ward

©2012 ThousandTongues.org, admin by Thousand Tongues CCLI #11520138

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Exhibit A



**Thistlebend Homework Accountability Cards**  
 “Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39)

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed the homework I covenanted to do each day, including learning my memory verse.

\_\_\_\_\_ I only completed \_\_\_\_\_ days of homework

The reason I did not fully complete my homework is:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Exhibit C

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

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit

Exhibit B



**THISTLEBEND**  
 MINISTRIES

**Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment**

**Affirmation**

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

**Practically, this means earnestly pursuing the following by God's grace:**  
 Believing You Have Received the Spirit of Sonship  
 Denying Self  
 Offering Yourself as a Living Sacrifice  
 Living as Members of One Body  
 Faithful Obedience  
 Speaking the Truth in Love

**Commitment**

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

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

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

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

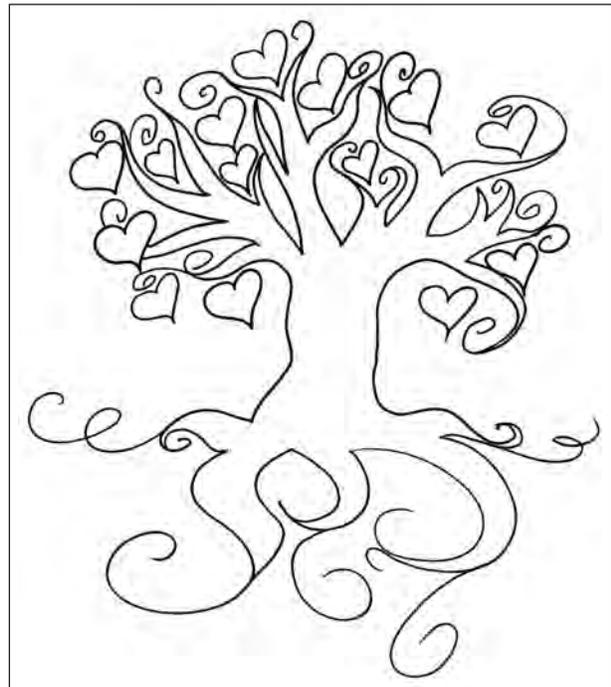
I commit by God's grace to completing my homework on a daily basis.

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

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

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

Exhibit D



# Planted by Streams of Water

*Not I, but Christ*





## Day One

### Planted by Streams of Water

#### Not I, but Christ

As I sit high atop Signal Mountain, it is a crisp, clear, cold winter day with the brightest of bright blue skies. There is not a cloud in sight. This is my favorite sky of all. My son Noel, however, insists there must be a few clouds in the sky to break up the expanse of blue. But without a doubt, the endless blue sky is my favorite. The light is streaming in the windows, there is very little humidity in the air, and you can see forever. It is such a different day than yesterday. Yesterday was a very dark, very rainy, foggy day.

As I was heading to my daughter's home in Chattanooga, I drove up the switchback road they call "the W." I was so glad that I was nearing the end of a very long and challenging day of travel. The falling rain, combined with the amount of water spraying up from the freeway, made for poor visibility. Tired and very anxious to reach my destination, I didn't really want to stop at the grocery store, but I needed to pick up a few treats for my granddaughter. Thankfully, I found a parking spot near the door and was able to make it in without getting drenched. I tried to quickly find the items I was looking for in this unfamiliar store and get in line. As I reached the checkout lane, the clerk asked, "How are you?" I said, "I am great, thank you. How are you?" Her head turned suddenly, and she looked at me with surprise and asked, "Really? Even when it has been such an awful, rainy day? How can you be so great on a day like today?" I said a quick, silent prayer. I responded that I had just arrived from out of town and was excited



about visiting my new grandbaby and my daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. I asked her if she was having a difficult day. As she was giving me my receipt, she explained she was having a very difficult year and that a lot of very hard things had happened. I asked her for her name and told her that I would be praying for her. She told me her name was Penny. I was already holding up the line when I received a phone call from my daughter Hannah to see if I had already left the store. I told her I hadn't. She then asked if I would please pick up some cooking oil. We all laughed, and I headed back to the aisles.

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

The Bible teaches that the joy of the Lord is to be our strength (Nehemiah 8:10) and that we are to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4). I knew painfully well that His joy hadn't been my strength in those very difficult times. It had been a harsh, disturbing realization. I had been through many trials before and found myself able to walk forward in joy and know His comfort, but that had not been the case in this most recent trial. At the time, I was reeling from the shock of my response, and I desperately longed to be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season, whose leaves did not wither (Psalm 1:3). But that just wasn't the case. I was forced to reexamine

my heart, my thoughts, my priorities, my affections. What was it that I held so dear? I thought I knew my Savior's love for me. I thought He was my all in all. But I was finding out He wasn't. We think we understand the affections of our hearts, but only the Lord knows. In the midst of the trial, I felt as though my life was flashing before me. I was straining to see what I was truly standing upon. What was I holding near and dear in my heart? Where did I place my trust? I discovered there were things hidden in my heart—fear, doubt, and hurt—all of which I had been unaware. And, oh, what pain they caused.

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

If we are in Christ, our hearts have been forever changed. We have been given new hearts that have the ability to know joy even in the most difficult circumstances. We have been given the desire for righteousness, holiness, and truth. We have been rescued and cleansed and have had our sin paid for in full by the blood of Christ! Not only has the penalty of our sin been paid for, but we have also been given the power to overcome sin and the hope of living in heaven one day without the presence of sin. We also have been given the Holy Spirit—God himself—and the Father's inheritance! And as if that weren't enough, we have been given access to the throne room of God, always and forever, to ask for and bring before Him anything and everything. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Romans 11:33). We want to do everything we can then to embrace the spiritual blessings given to us in Christ!

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts all of us who know God and who are called by Him to get our priorities right, to prepare our minds for action, and to set our hope fully on Jesus (1 Peter 1:13). He teaches that since we have been redeemed, rescued,

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

We have been called to join the Lord in the work of overcoming our remaining sin, trusting in the power we have been given in the Holy Spirit and the grace and forgiveness we have been given in Christ, for we are not able to do it alone. This work will be a battle. “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17). In every believer’s heart there is a constant struggle between the old man and the new. We can be blind to the old man that so fiercely resists the truth as he creeps up from behind, seeking to rule and reign. Listen to John Owen’s perspective:

Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and against every degree we grow to. Let not that man [or woman] think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who does not kill sin in his way takes no steps towards his journey’s end. He who finds not opposition from it, and who sets not himself in every particular to its mortification, is at peace with it, not dying to it.<sup>1</sup>

We need to ask God to give us eyes to see our sinful ways so that we are able to get to the root of them and so that we can recognize our sin and overcome it. Paul instructs



and informs us in Ephesians 4:21-24 that “you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” We want to turn toward God, draw near to Him, and have Him search our hearts. We want to be rooted and established in Christ, filled with Christ, and overflowing with Christ—and not ourselves! If we want to walk in the Spirit and not live out the desires of the flesh, we have work to do! “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). We must be about the work the Lord has called us to do, the work of walking out our salvation. Paul further says that since we have put off the old woman, we are to now put away our old ways. “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (Ephesians 4:25-28).

As with a garden, if we don’t dig up the roots of these weeds in our hearts and put them to death, they will overtake our hearts and choke the life right out of us! The fleshly roots of our hearts wrap themselves around and cling to the most insidious, distasteful, and worthless things, preparing the way for the weeds of sin to sprout in our hearts. However, if instead we put the roots of the flesh to death and cultivate the roots of Christ and His righteousness, a color-filled, fragrant, fruitful, and abundant life will begin to blossom and flourish. We will be rooted and established in Love himself.

So, this is what we’re going to be doing over the next several weeks: getting to the root of our sin by allowing the Lord to search us and reveal to us what lies deep in our hearts. Psalm 139:23-24 says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my



thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”  
Then, by His grace, as we pick up our cross, die to self, and confess and repent of our sins, a powerful, life-changing work will be accomplished in us. We will be impacting generations.

Over the coming weeks, please remember that getting to the root of your sins is a lifelong process. When we are in Christ, the Father sees us through Him. We are precious in His sight, and He adores us with a love we have a hard time comprehending. This week, and in the weeks to follow, will you make it your goal to choose to believe that He loves you, right where you are—imperfect, sinful, but distinctly His? He loves you, not because of your performance, but because of your position in Christ. Be patient and allow Him to lead and do His work, His way. There are times when the Lord will deliver us from strongholds of sin immediately. However, much of the time, God works slowly and deliberately. His desire is to have a close, intimate relationship with us, and he achieves this by making us dependent upon Him. He is looking for your trust and obedience, not your immediate and instantaneous perfection. His Son is perfect and has already fulfilled all of the requirements of the law for you. Together with the Lord, you are working out your salvation. Christ is your righteousness and is working in and through you. It is all part of His wise and more than wonderful plan. He is building a new kingdom in your heart! Breaking down the old and replacing it with the new is only possible through the mercy, power, and grace of God! It involves crying out to the Lord and listening to Him. We want to learn to ask God for all we need. Look to Him and plead. Listen to King Solomon’s request in the face of a huge task and hear God’s response. Take it to heart:

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father . . . At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king



in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding<sup>2</sup> to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (1 Kings 3:3-14)

Choose to partner with your Lord and ask Him to give you wisdom as He gave it to Solomon. As you begin this process and as the Lord reveals your sin, you may feel more than a little overwhelmed by the sense of your unholiness. Do not be discouraged; although it may feel awful, it is a good thing. It is a wonderful and beautiful work you are doing and one that will impact generations to come. Each time you see your sin, remember to look to Jesus, your Savior and your Lord, hide yourself in Him, and put all your hope in Christ and not in self. Remember, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). When you feel particularly discouraged and want to give up, run into the arms of your Savior and Lord. “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10). Practice fixing your eyes upon Him, putting your trust in Him and in His mercy and grace. He loves you and loved you while you were yet a sinner. If you have surrendered your life to Him, it is very important to remember your position in Him. You are no longer who you once were; you now are in Christ. Walk forward in Him. This endeavor is well worth your effort, because a great harvest lies ahead.

## Taking the Truth to Heart

Day One *cont.*

### Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting!

“Let us aim to make diligent progress in the way of the Lord, and let us not lose heart if we have only a little to show for it. . . . Only let us fix our gaze clearly and directly on the goal.”<sup>3</sup>

This week and every week during this portion of your study, we are going to pray the above Scripture and make it the cry of our hearts. Notice that the psalmist is asking God to search his heart. And he not only asks Him to search his heart, but he bravely also asks God to try him! He is asking the Lord to bring trials and tests into his life to reveal the reality of his heart. This is not our earthly mindset. We so desperately hope the Lord won't bring trials into our lives and often feel that if He really loved us He would protect us from them, yet our faith is strengthened through them. Not only does the Lord refine and strengthen our faith through trials, but, as we will learn so clearly in this study, the Lord brings the hidden things of our hearts to light through trials—not only the good and the bad, but also the most praiseworthy! Listen to 1 Peter 1:6-7: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Trials are a powerful tool of the Lord, particularly (and this is important) when we truly believe He is working all things together for good and when we draw near to Him by grace through faith.

In the excerpt from Psalm 139, David asks the Lord to go deep. David was well-acquainted with trials, yet he asked to be tested because he desired to have a heart like God's. David, who was once a shepherd boy and then anointed king by God, is described in the Bible as a man after God's heart. Because of David's pursuit after God, it is so helpful to carefully observe his psalms. We can learn so much about how to have an intimate and real relationship with God. In his psalms, we are also able to observe David's understanding of God, his response to God and His Word, and his relationship with God. We will have a great opportunity to learn from David and the other psalmists during this study. For years I longed for a mentor, someone who would teach me how to walk with God and have an intimate relationship with Him. Surprisingly, the Lord didn't bring a living person into my life, but led me to sit under David, a man who lived thousands of years ago! It was in his psalms that I learned more about God and about how my heart should respond to Him. I resolved to pray the Scriptures at every opportunity, to listen to David and learn from him, and to not be afraid.

### **Step One**

Turn in your Bible to Psalm 139. Read it through, observing God's love, knowledge, and care for you. Then take a few minutes to ask the Lord to search you and to test you today and throughout the week to reveal any ungodly way in you and in your heart. Ultimately we know the Lord is the Shepherd of our hearts. He loves you. He is a tender, loving, trustworthy Shepherd. Remember the gospel and speak the truth to your heart (see different ways to do this on page A16 of the Appendix).

### **Step Two**

Ask the Lord to help you observe your actions and your words—your fruit. Now and each day this week, go to the tree at the end of this week's lesson (page 23) and fill in the fruit of the tree, represented by hearts, with any ungodly actions and words you



observed (see page A4 in the Appendix for an example). At this point in time, don't write down your thoughts or your feelings (which we'll get to later). Strictly focus on outward, observable behaviors and spoken words (use pages A5-A7 in the Appendix as a guide). On class day, during your small group "Taking the Truth to Heart" time, each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share three to four of the sinful fruits on their trees. As you do this, always be mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

Why is taking the truth to heart important? Why do we take the time to observe ourselves and think through these things? Because the Bible tells us we are to be transformed! And how are we to accomplish this? By the renewing of our hearts and minds! The apostle Paul wrote, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:1-2). We are exhorted not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing we may discern God's will. Speaking about this passage, a 16th century theologian wrote:

It is no small thing—for the sacred cannot serve the profane—that we should be consecrated to God and that from now on all we think, speak, plan, and do should be for his glory!

If, then, we are not our own, but belong instead to the Lord, it is clear what we must do to avoid going astray, and what our goal must be in every department of life. We are not our own: let not reason and will therefore determine our plans or the things we need to do. We are not our own: let us therefore look beyond what the flesh suggests is good for us. We are not our own: let us therefore forget ourselves as much as we can—ourselves and everything around us.

Again, we read that we are the Lord's: let us then live and die for him. We are the Lord's: let his will and wisdom govern all we do. We are the Lord's: let every part of our lives be directed to him as to their sole end. How privileged is the man who, knowing that he is not his own, denies his reason lordship and dominion over him and surrenders it instead to God! For just as there is no

greater curse than self-satisfaction, which leads to ruin and destruction, so also the only haven of salvation is to cease to be wise in oneself, and to want nothing on one's own account, but simply to follow the Lord.

Let our first move thus be to step back from ourselves, so as to focus all of our thoughts on the service of God. By service, I mean not only attentive obedience to his word but the cultivation of a mind which forsaking its own understanding, turns right round and submits to God's Spirit. This transformation is what Paul calls the renewal of the mind.<sup>4</sup>

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

As you end your study today, reread the hymn at the end of the Welcome section on page viii and then close in prayer using the powerful and beautiful prayer from page vii of the Welcome section.

## Day Two

### Blessed Is the Woman Who . . .

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

In all that he does, he prospers.

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

### Taking the Truth to Heart

What has the Lord brought to your attention so far? Don't be afraid. As He reveals your sin, He will forgive that sin. Bring it before Him. Follow the instructions from the Taking the Truth to Heart section of Day One and refer to the examples in the Appendix. Take a moment to fill in the hearts of your tree (at the end of the lesson, on page 23) with your sinful, outward and observable behaviors.



## Day Three

### The Lord Is Your Shepherd

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

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

### Taking the Truth to Heart

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



## Day Four

### My Soul Shall Abide in Well-Being

**Psalm 24:3-4** Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Read the passage above. Then read all of Psalm 24 in your Bible. Slowly and carefully walk through each verse, noting what you learn about God and those who are fully devoted to Him. Write what you learn on the facing page. Ask the Lord to transform your heart and your mind to think according to His Word. Know that only He can do the work.

### Taking the Truth to Heart

We ascend the hill of the Lord by faith. None of us is qualified to do that; we all fall short. But praise be to God, for He has made a way where there was no way—by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:20-24)! Jesus is the only one who perfectly fulfills the description of the person in Psalm 24. However, when Jesus saves us, He makes us more and more like himself and gives us His Holy Spirit. But we have a role to play. If we want to be holy as He is holy, we have work to do! As we, by His grace, put off the old woman and put away our old ways, the Holy Spirit will move. Review the instructions from Day One. Remember to fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward and observable behaviors.



## Day Five

### O Lord, Teach Me Your Ways

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

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

### Taking the Truth to Heart

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



## Day Six

### Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

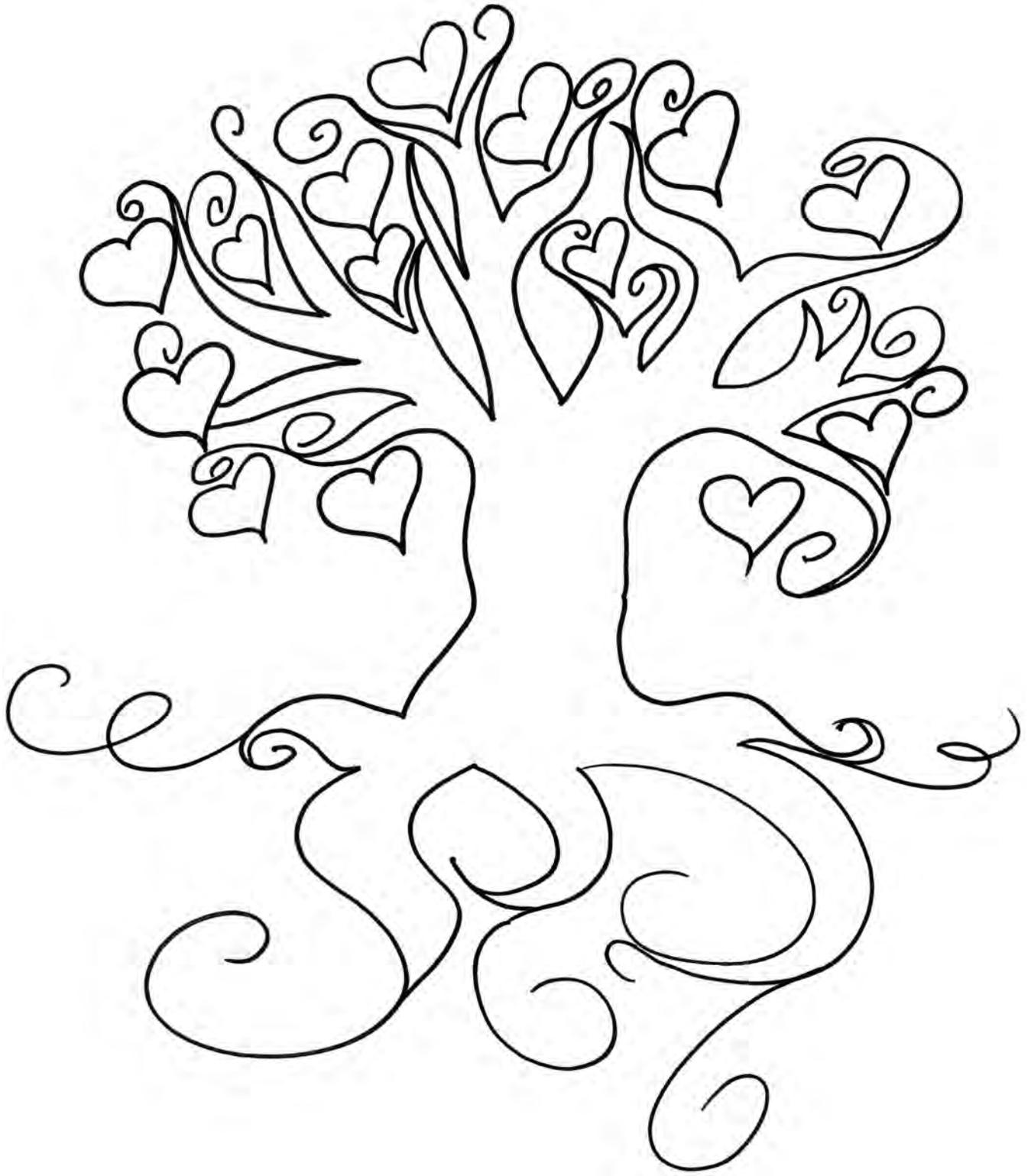
Lesson One begins the Taking the Truth to Heart process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We have been instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits, sinful actions and/or words, on the tree located on the opposite page. The small group time in class will end each week with the Taking the Truth to Heart time. Each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share the sinful fruit from their trees, again being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Remember, we are observing the outer man so that we can better understand the inner man. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and understanding—for eyes to see your behaviors and ears to hear your words in such a way that you are able to understand the remaining sin in your heart. Praise God for His great mercy and take in the amazing grace of His gospel. Keep your eyes on your Savior, the author and perfecter of your faith.

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

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Lesson One - Sinful Fruit Only



## Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

(Complete in your small group.)

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit



## Heart of a Woman

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!* Psalm 139:23-24

As Christians, we too often ignore the symptoms of sin in our lives, and we don't take the time, have the focus, or have the trust in the Lord that is needed to look inward to the root of our sin and deal with it. The Lord has called us to be holy as He is holy, so we want our hearts to reflect the holiness and righteousness of God Most High. But we have to be willing to do the hard work to see our sin from His perspective. In this study, we are led to begin asking the Lord to reveal to us what is deep and hidden within our hearts, so that we can confess and believe that we will be cleansed of sin and filled instead with the righteousness of Christ. The goal of this study is lasting heart transformation. Nine weeks.

---

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*