



# Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

*Focus Scripture: Psalm 63*

by Laurie Aker

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study  
*Falling in Love Again with Your Lord*  
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Thistlebend Cottage Press  
2212 Lakeland Road  
Louisville, Kentucky 40223

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Thistlebend Ministries is a 501c3 non-profit organization.  
This study and its corresponding resources are made possible through  
the generous contributions of the Friends of Thistlebend and people like you.



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

This book is dedicated to  
my loving husband, Kevin;  
my wonderful children,  
Megan and her husband, Mark;  
Hannah and her husband, Chris;  
Luke; and Noel and his wife, Erin;  
and my precious grandchildren,  
Brandt, Tilly Grace, and Gideon.

Special thanks to  
the Thistlebend leadership team,  
the Friends of Thistlebend Ministries,  
and the Governing Board of Thistlebend Ministries  
for their prayers, encouragement, and support.



# Welcome to a Thistlebend Discipleship Study!

It is a blessing and an honor that you have chosen to participate in a Thistlebend discipleship Bible study. Our curriculum incorporates mentoring and discipleship components within the context of a traditional Bible study. Thistlebend studies are effective in helping women think and respond biblically, impacting their marriages and families for generations to come. We pray the same for you!

More in depth information about our studies, ministry model, and methods can be found on our app or on our website at [Thistlebend.org](http://Thistlebend.org). If you have never participated in a Thistlebend study before, we strongly encourage you to view our Orientation video and Orientation document. Both can be found online on our app (click [Begin Here](#)) or on our website (click [Resources/Orientation to Thistlebend](#)). You will benefit more from this study by understanding the mentoring and discipleship principles that are interwoven into all aspects of our curriculum. If you are going through the study by yourself and have questions, please contact us at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org).

We are excited for all the Lord has in store for you through this study. We would love to hear from you as you go through the study—send us your stories, comments, and prayer requests! We welcome your questions or suggestions at any time. We are here to serve and support you in any way possible.

## **SUGGESTED STUDY FORMAT FOR A CHURCH OR NEIGHBORHOOD SMALL GROUP** (See page iii for Online study format)

### **Large Group Mentoring and Discipleship**

- Each week, begin class with praise and prayer. Then open with the mentoring and teaching time by the teaching leader. \*Optional video/audio teaching resources are available on our app (Discipleship Studies tab) and website (Resources/Study Specific Companion Resources).

### **Suggested Order:**

- Week One Class: Introduction to the Study (welcome fellowship, introduction teaching, small group discussion of teaching time, icebreakers, etc.)
- Then each participant begins in the study workbook in “Welcome” and “Lesson One” the following day.
- Week Two Class (and following): Teaching lecture on study workbook “Lesson One” that was just completed and discuss “Lesson One” in small groups.
- Then each participant begins “Lesson Two” in their study workbook the following day. (Continue to follow this pattern.)

### **Small Group Mentoring and Discipleship**

- Following the teaching time, participants move to their small groups. The small group leader opens by reading the prayer at the beginning of the Discussion Questions (available on our app and website). The group then discusses how the Lord used the teaching 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 lesson from the Discussion Questions. Questions are then asked covering each day of the lesson.
- Group members are asked to fill out a Homework Accountability Card (see Example A at the end of this section) 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 Example B) and assist them in areas where they may need help.
- The small group then together recites the Scripture memory verse(s) for that lesson.

### **Taking the Truth to Heart Group**

- After discussing the teaching lecture and homework, group members move into even 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” pages (see Example C), which are completed at the end of each lesson on Day 6. To allow time for all women to share, a time limit of three minutes is set for each person. Keeping a strict time limit helps keep the focus on God and His Word. The purpose of this time is 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 their “Taking the Truth to Heart” chart (see Example D) so they can be praying specifically for one another throughout the week.

- Each group member will share the Scripture the Lord is using that week to renew their mind and transform their heart (Rom. 12:2). They will then confess their sin to one another (James 5:16). Finally, they will share how they will work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) in repentance and faith through an action step they will be working on throughout the coming week (Heb. 12:1-3).
- Beginning in Week 3, each group member will begin their “Taking the Truth to Heart” time by sharing how they did with their action step from the previous week. This helps us hold one another accountable.
- Group members are continually encouraged to remember God’s love through the gospel as they share transparently.

### **What to Bring**

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

## **SUGGESTED STUDY FORMAT FOR ONLINE PARTICIPANTS**

### **Begin with Teaching Video/Audio (available online)**

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

### **Review Discussion Questions (available online)**

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

### **Taking the Truth to Heart**

- Complete your “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Example C at the end of this section) on the last day of each lesson. You will be prompted to write the Scripture the Lord is using that week to renew your mind and transform your heart (Rom. 12:2). Then you will name your sin. Lastly, you will write out how you will work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12) in repentance and faith through an action step to be working on throughout the coming week (Heb. 12:1-3).
- Share your “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” pages with your online group leader by taking a photo of your pages and sending them via email or text. The purpose of this time is to help teach women how to identify their sin and confess it.
- Your online group leader will respond to you and pray for you specifically.

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

## **HOW THE DISCIPLESHIP STUDY WORKBOOK IS ORGANIZED**

- Each lesson in your workbook contains six days of homework.
- A Scripture memory passage is available on the inside cover of each study for those who want to practice this discipline. Prompts are given throughout each lesson to practice the memory passage.

### **Day 1**

- Each lesson begins with a devotion that is meant to give direction for the week and help prepare your heart and mind to receive the Lord's teaching throughout the remainder of the lesson.
- This day ends with a guided prayer section to help you reach a frame of heart and mind ready to commune with the Lord.

### **Days 2-5**

- On these days you will be asked to read Scripture and answer questions to help you think according to the Word of God and to have the Lord search your heart.
- Each day begins with a Scripture passage that sets the focus for the day.
- Throughout the study you will notice that you are often asked to copy God's Word, word for word, even when it's printed right before you in your Bible or in the text on the page. Here is why. We tend to spend so little time with our Bibles really pondering or meditating on what God has to say because we all are so busy and task-oriented that we barely slow down enough to focus on our quiet times with the Lord. Writing out Scripture helps us to slow down and really think about what we are reading, so that it will sink deep into our hearts. Our goal is not merely to increase in knowledge, but to have the Lord and His Word shape our hearts and minds.
- At the close of your study each day, you will find a "Taking the Truth to Heart" section where you will be asked to choose a Scripture from the homework that day that spoke to your heart and write it in the space provided. Meditate upon this Scripture throughout your day in order to take the truth to heart and bring it to life.
- 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 ask questions or share answers at [info@thistlebend.org](mailto:info@thistlebend.org). Online participants may communicate directly with their online group leader.

## **Day 6: 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. It is completed using the *daily* “Taking the Truth to Heart” sections.
- This 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.

### **Time Options to Choose from for Your Daily Homework**

Choose the amount of time appropriate for your walk with the Lord and complete as much of the lesson as you can in the amount of time you commit to—on a daily basis. We encourage you to seek Him and His guidance as you make this choice.

- Option 1: 15-20 min.
- Option 2: 20-30 min.
- Option 3: 30-45 min.
- Option 4: Complete the lesson regardless of the amount of time it takes.

**Important Note:** Keep in mind, if you are committing to Options 1-3, you may not be able to complete that day’s homework in your allotted amount of time. When you begin your homework on the following day, begin with the next day’s homework. Don’t try to finish the previous day’s homework. Your goal is to set a pattern of consistent Bible study and to trust the Lord with what is left undone. (And of course, you are always free to return to the missed material later, after the study is finished.) Regardless of which option you choose, make sure you leave enough time to complete your “Taking the Truth to Heart” section each day.

## **STAY CONNECTED**

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! But if missing class:

- Please watch or listen to the teaching lecture on our app (Discipleship Studies tab) and website (Resources/Study Specific Companion Resources).
- Notify your small group leader of your absence.
- Send your “Taking the Truth to Heart” information to your small group leader.

### **Note**

Examples referenced are located on the following page. These and others can also be found on our app and website.

All of these documents and more are available on our app (Begin Here) and website (Resources).

### Example A



## Homework Accountability

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

*Reason for incomplete homework:*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### Example B



## THISTLEBEND 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.

Fall 2018

### Example C

## Day Six

— ✠ —

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

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

**PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**  
 In what areas has the Lord given you wisdom, grace, repentance, or encouragement this week? Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

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

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

**STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**  
 What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week. Ask for the Lord's forgiveness and receive His mercy and grace (1 John 1:9-10).

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

**STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**  
 Walking forward in repentance and faith by God's grace, what will you "put on" (Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:10, 12, 14)? How are you going to do this? Be specific in your plan of action and find encouragement by what the Lord is going to do.

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

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

### Example D

## Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

1

Step One

*Taking the Truth To Heart*

2

Step Two

*Putting the Flesh To Death*

3

Step Three

*Bringing the Truth To Life*

NAME	SCRIPTURE	SIN	ACTION



# Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

*Focus Scripture: Psalm 63*

A Thistlebend Discipleship Study



# O God, You Are My God

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

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

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

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



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

I remembered the passage that I had read in my morning quiet time earlier that day.

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

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

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



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

There are those who consider Song of Solomon to have been written expressly for a romantic relationship between a husband and a wife. However, consider the possibility of a dual meaning in this book, one that also expresses the love relationship the Lord desires to have with His bride, the Church,<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). What is being conveyed is not romantic infatuation, but true, abiding love from a passionate God who loves His people intimately.

It’s an amazing and awesome thing to consider that God Most High, Creator of the universe, desires an intimate relationship with His people. R.C. Sproul wrote, “Saint Augustine taught that God created the world out of nothing. Creation was something like the magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Except God didn’t have a rabbit, and He didn’t even have a hat. God created the world from nothing. Once there was nothing, then suddenly, by the command of God, there was a universe.”<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).

How and what could we desire more than to enter into an intimate, loving, and vibrant relationship with this God? This God, who has the unfathomable power and authority to create the universe from nothing, with loving care, wisdom, and precision, desires a relationship with us. His Word tells us that He rejoices over His children greatly (Zeph. 3:17). And for us, there is no sweeter thing in this world than communion with Him. As a husband desires the devotion and companionship of his wife, the Lord desires the devotion and companionship of His bride, the Church. He wants nothing more than to glorify himself in and through us and for us to fully delight in Him. He says, *“I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people”* (Lev. 26:12); *“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved”* (Rom. 9:25; Hos. 2:23).

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

Maybe this is a good place to pause my story. Perhaps you identify with some or all of what I've shared so far of my story, or maybe you are one who has followed the Lord faithfully but still long for more of Him. Countless women are in the same place that I was. There is something that keeps them from following the Lord fully and accessing by faith all that they have been given in Christ. Maybe it is an ideal, an expectation, a misconception, or even an idol. For many of us, it's not so much that we have lost our grip on the promises in God's Word; it's that we have never been taught how to use them, nor have they ever been fully integrated into our hearts and applied to our core thoughts and beliefs. It is a lifetime endeavor to "*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet. 3:18).

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

This is where it becomes clear that we need the help of the Holy Spirit and other Christians. We need one another for support, fellowship, love, encouragement, feedback, and accountability. We all are sheep in need of a shepherd, a patient Shepherd, to help us learn how to live what we believe. We don't want our flesh and its default habits to rule and reign; we want Christ to rule and reign in our hearts.



So being in a Bible study with other women, in the context of authentic mentoring and discipleship, is important to help us guard our thinking and guard against the flesh. However, there are those who think because they have the Holy Spirit, go to church, and participate in a weekly home or community group, that they are doing enough because there just isn't enough time in the day to study the Bible and be in another small group. It can be viewed simply as busyness. It's not. And while the goal is not to add one more thing to our plates, it is imperative that we allow the Lord to order our lives, multiply our time, and put everything in its proper place. We want to learn how to live in Christ so that fear can't take precedence over faith, so that anger won't overrule love, and so that pride doesn't trump humility. We want to learn how to love one another and help each other love God and obey His Word.

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

O God, you are my God. I want you to be my God. You are worthy of all my worship, all my praise, all my heart, soul, mind, and strength! Please meet me wherever 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 (James 4:8). Wherever someone or something is taking your place, please reveal it to me by your grace. Grant me the repentance I need to humbly confess and forsake all else to seek your face and serve you only.



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

## D A Y T W O

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are you afraid?

Do you feel all alone or let down?

Are you anxious about many things?

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

Have things not gone the way you expected?

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

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

Do you find yourself comparing?

Have you been hurt, rejected, overlooked?

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

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



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

## D A Y T H R E E

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

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



When we are in Christ, we belong to God by adoption. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 7:23), purchased with the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He stood in our place, the spotless one for sinful ones. He laid down His life to redeem us from worthless, worldly, and wanton living “*to purify for himself a people*” who would delight in Him and be “*zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14). Although many people might say God is their God and believe they are followers of Christ, much of their lives, without realizing it, tells a different story. They exhibit the symptoms of a divided heart, worshiping idols of self, the world, and other people—and not surrendering in worship to God alone. Assuming they are okay, they continue on, not aware there is a problem. They are not alone, and they are not the first to experience these symptoms. Jesus exhorted the Ephesian church by saying, “. . . *you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen . . .*” (Rev. 2:4-5).

Read Revelation 2:1-7. (Optional: if you have more time, read Revelation 1-2.)

Do you hear Jesus pleading with the church in Ephesus to love Him above all? He is speaking to the visible church in Ephesus, made up of believers and unbelievers,<sup>4</sup> wanting them to examine their hearts because there is evidence of *unrepentant* sin among them. He wants to be their all in all, their everything, and for nothing to take His place in their hearts. They may think they have forsaken everything else, but some still allow many things and people to take His place in their hearts. He is no longer number one to them, and, as a result, they are missing out on the life and purpose He has for them. There are those who tremble when reading Jesus' strong warning to the Ephesians that He would come and remove their lampstand if they did not repent. Some fear this could mean they are not saved or that they could lose their salvation. Remember that the Christian life is a battle—against sin, Satan, the flesh, and the world. We must fight fervently against these foes, and fight to love the Lord with our all by forsaking all other loves. As we do this, we bear evidence that we are in fact His alone. As believers we will still sin, but sin will not be a way of life for us. Those who belong to Christ are ruled by Christ, are His forever, and cannot lose the salvation granted to them by Him.



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

Is there anyone you haven't forgiven?

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

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

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

Do you like to have everything under control or like to be in control and struggle when you're not?

Are online games, Facebook, or Instagram major distractions for you?

Do you just want to have fun?

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

Do you find yourself getting angry often?

Is your mind continually wandering?

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

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

Does discontentment, discouragement, or despair weigh you down?

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

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



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

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

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



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

## D A Y F O U R

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

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

- 1 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
- 2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.*
- 3 *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
- 4 *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
- 5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*
- 6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*



## The Good Shepherd

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

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

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



## Restorer of Souls

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

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

Lord, I confess:

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

Love	Goodness
Joy	Faithfulness
Peace	Gentleness
Patience	Self-Control
Kindness	



### Through the Valley

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Ps. 23:4)*

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

What are some of the deep, dark valleys the Lord has walked you through? Are you in one today?

How have your valleys been fruitful?



### My Cup Overflows

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

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

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

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

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



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

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



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

## D A Y F I V E

Over three thousand years ago, God's spokesperson Moses, the mediator between God and the nation of Israel, proclaimed this command from God: "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*" (Deut. 6:4-5). Almost fifteen hundred 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*" (Mark 12:30).

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



As we pursue falling in love with the Lord, we will be studying the heart cry of a man who longed after God. David was an ordinary man who knew his frailty intimately and the unrelenting love of his extraordinary God. He was a man who not only talked with God moment-by-moment, but he was also a man whose relationship with God was so intimate and real that the Lord recorded his heart and transparent thoughts in the Bible for us to see and experience. David's relationship with God is a model, a picture of what it would look like to walk side by side with Almighty God, with our hearts knit to His and His heart knit to ours. It is a picture of a relationship that is real and raw. In his psalms, it is as if a door is opened for us to enter into the private place of David's unguarded, intimate dialogue with God Most High. As we read these psalms, we see how

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

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

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



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

Ponder with me for a moment . . . as if there was no limit to what God could do, which, of course, there isn't! What would our lives look like if we truly believed nothing was impossible, and we sincerely desired to know and love the Lord above all things? What would it be like if we sought after a deep and intimate relationship with the Lord with our entire being, asking Him daily to give us ears to hear Him speak to us in His Word as we spend time with Him and as we walk along the way? We would want to have His still, small voice speak softly in our ear and to be in His presence as He takes our hand, leads us in the path of righteousness, and steadies our heart through the valley of the shadow of death.

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

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

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

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

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

## **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

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

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# Earnestly I Seek You

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

**G**od Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, has a love for us that our human hearts will never fully grasp this side of heaven. It is a love that surpasses knowledge, a love that surpasses comprehension. God has created within us a deep need for Him and His love. We can find ourselves alone, lonely, and isolated if we don't seek after Him, if He is not our sole pursuit. In our quest to fulfill the need He has created within us for Him, 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 yet unsatisfied. We are left longing, lonely, and empty. Paradoxically, we are unable even to begin to absorb God's love apart from God himself opening our hearts and our minds to Him, yet our union with Him is paramount because true life is found in Him. God's plan is that our very purpose and fulfillment is Him; we were made to glorify Him and enjoy Him fully.

We must caution ourselves against our default responses and bad habits that impede our earnest pursuit of the Lord. One of the most dangerous habits is the tendency to look around at others, trying to gauge where we stand with God. When we compare ourselves with others, we easily fall prey to pride and discouragement. No one is truly capable of assessing their own spiritual condition because we see from such a limited and flawed perspective. We must be careful. If we take our eyes off Christ and look at others, we can be deceived into thinking we are doing okay or better than or worse than someone else. No human being can set the standard, because Christ is the only standard. We must keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). Clearly we must examine ourselves as Scripture commands, but we must do so humbly, bringing our concerns to the Lord and relying on the Holy Spirit to lead. *"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” (John 16:13-15).*

Another sinful habit is to consciously or unconsciously “put God in His place,” to marginalize Him, making Him *part* of our lives instead of our everything. We sideline Him and turn what was meant to be a relationship into a system of dos and don’ts, an acquisition of knowledge, a life philosophy, or even a ticket to a club to satisfy our need to belong here on earth and in heaven.

Related to this is one of the of the most derailing hindrances to spiritual growth, the habit of misplaced trust. We are all oddly unaware of our habitual, unconsciously learned default responses. Without realizing it, we put our trust in our perspective, our feelings, our way of doing things, or in any number of other things rather than in God, His Word, and His very clear and present promises. We might know God and His Word well, yet we go with something quite contrary to it, often without realizing it, because the contrary aligns with what we feel, what we think, or what others think. For example, God tells us repeatedly in His Word, in various ways, that He will provide for all of our needs. Philippians 4:19 provides one such example: *“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”* Yet when something happens—our husband loses his job, our daughter’s test score indicates she has a learning disability, a friend betrays our trust, or even something as simple as a flat tire occurs at an inopportune time—we panic. We become distraught and thoughts and feelings flood our mind. “God has forgotten me. God doesn’t love me. I am all alone!” More traumatic and confounding situations, like abuse, abandonment, poverty, or long-term illness, can be all the more difficult.

Thankfully God loves us and willingly keeps His promises to us even when we don’t keep ours. He patiently continues to train us and put us to the test over and over again so that we can learn to believe the truth even when the flesh rises up—so that we learn to put our trust in Him and His promises. None of us are alone in these ways. All of us have areas where we misplace our trust. We want to intentionally practice trust so that we don’t become victims of our flesh. And we want to pursue God and His righteousness. It is a precious gift of God’s grace when we desire righteousness and want to live in a love relationship with the Lord. It is His grace that gives us a desire to fulfill the purpose to which He has called us, by His power and for His glory.

As we contemplate moving past these hindrances and impediments, it’s important to know that we can’t form a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord on our own or in our own strength.



We need God's grace. Draw near to God and ask Him to knit your heart to His and to help you seek after Him. Trust in Him and in His promises in His Word. Surrender to Him. Allow Him to move you, to mold you, to shape you. As you continue through this study, resolve to make Him your one pursuit, your sole passion. Seek Him earnestly. God speaks great encouragement to our souls when He says, "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart*" (Jer. 29:13).

As we continue on this journey of falling in love again with our Lord, we need to set ourselves apart and commit ourselves to pursuing a relationship with Him. Each of us individually must make a plan to carve out a place and dedicate a special time to be with the Lord alone. Consider what time would be best for you each day to have your quiet time with Him. (You might consider time spent in this study as your quiet time.) Ask the Lord for His help to do this. Also, if you miss your time with Him or your regular time doesn't work on a particular day, don't beat yourself up, but don't ignore it either. Make a "date" for another time that day. When David says, "*earnestly I seek you,*" it sounds like a simple thing to say, but this simple phrase is significant. David has made a decision, a faith decision in keeping with God's Word. He has determined in his spirit that there is one thing alone that he is going to seek after with his all. He is willing to focus every fiber of his being toward this one thing, determined that no matter what goes on in his world, no matter how many people or things are screaming for his attention, and no matter what anyone else says is important, he is going to seek after the Lord.

I remember wanting to earnestly seek after the Lord so that I could love Him with my all. I wanted to be head-over-heels committed and immersed in Christ and be totally His, but something was in my way. An invisible barrier was holding me back, something I didn't understand until much later. My way of thinking was in the way. I knew there was something that separated me; I could feel that tension in my life and the wall that existed, but I didn't know what it was!

God commands us to love Him with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength, knowing that we are not capable of accomplishing that on our own. Yet we are to go forward by faith and seek after Him with our all, *believing* that as we do, He will accomplish His work in our lives. Without faith we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). Without faith we cannot believe that God can transform a sinful heart by grace. However, in my human thinking I plunged headlong into seeking after the Lord, but I was trying to do it in my own strength. Even though I was a believer, I was working hard, passionately and persistently, to be good and to change my heart. I wasn't trusting in God and in His mercy, His grace, and His power to do what only He can do. I continued to focus on my performance. Truthfully I was afraid even to look into my heart and see the darkness there.



I couldn't imagine it ever being any other way. I had confessed my sins many times before, but I felt embarrassed and ashamed that so much sin still remained. I thought to myself, "No one else is a sinner like me!" Hiding and repressing it was the only thing I knew to do. I thought I just needed to try harder to be good. I knew I didn't love the Lord with all my heart. All of the effort in the world wasn't going to make me love the Lord.

There is no way we can love the Lord in our own strength, no matter how hard we try or how many times someone urges us to do so. If we seek to do it in our own strength, we are certain to fail and fall. If righteousness was achievable by good works or excellent performance, there would be no need for Christ to take our sin upon himself, stand in our place, bear the wrath of God on our behalf, die the death we deserve, and pay the eternal penalty we owe. When the Lord opens our eyes to see—even dimly—our sinful flesh, the provision He has made on our behalf, who He is, and what Christ has done, there is nothing we would want to do more than to seek after Him and follow His command to love Him with our all.

So the question still remains, what was in the way for me? What was keeping me from being able to follow Him? It was wanting what I wanted. I wasn't honest with myself. I wanted the things of the world *and* God. I wanted God's way *and* my way. I wanted to please Him *and* others! When the Lord is not first, when He is not Lord and not the one you serve, other things in your life end up out of whack. You set out to follow Him but are quickly derailed or distracted by the other hidden desires in your heart. But when your love relationship with the Lord is central, when your eyes are fixed on Him, and when He is everything, all else will fall into its rightful place. Think about the first time a baby walks without holding on to anything. The baby is able to walk forward and let go because he fixes his eyes on his parent, the one he trusts and desires so completely that he is willing to let go.

Remember, your relationship with God doesn't happen just in those solitary moments of quiet, but it happens as you live your life moment by moment together with Him. Each day as you close your book and end your quiet time, ask the Lord to keep the ears of your heart open. Walk with the Lord and listen. Carefully obey His Word and ask Him to teach you along the way. Think of yourself as getting up and walking with Him through your day. Allow the Comforter to love you, to care for you, to speak to your heart, and to encourage you. Don't hesitate to talk to Him, even about the silly things. Lean upon Him and draw near to Him. Put away distractions, long lists of to-dos, and negative thoughts of condemnation, fear, and what others might think. Think about the words of Psalm 63:1 over and over: "*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you.*" Make these words



the prayer of your heart. Remember that God wants to speak to you through His Word to encourage and strengthen you. Be alert and listen attentively for what the Holy Spirit may be reminding you about from the Word to guide and direct you throughout your day as you sit in your house, go grocery shopping, clean the kitchen, drive to soccer practice, sit at your desk, or lead a meeting.

The more you draw near and get to know God, the more He may surprise you. He is so much more loving, caring, and present than we expect. He has greater plans for you than you have for yourself, but His ways are not our ways. He always has His eternal purposes in mind while working all things together for our good and His glory. He may not move when you want Him to move or answer when you want Him to answer. He may not change your circumstances, but He loves you with an everlasting, perfect love. He is God. He is *your* God. He knows what is best for you. Go forward by faith and enter into your relationship with Him expecting Him to answer the desires of your heart. He promises us that whatever we ask in His name, He will do. *“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart”* (Ps. 37:3-4). May you love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and may your relationship with the Lord far exceed and transform every other relationship in your life.

*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:7)*

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (John 15:16)*

As you close your day today, take a moment to pray through the suggested prayer below.

O Lord, I want you alone to be my God. I want to earnestly seek after you with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. By your grace, help my soul to thirst for more and more of you. May my flesh follow after you, for I long for you and your righteousness. May I fix my gaze upon you and behold you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory. I want to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, stand firm against the darkness, and cling to you, trusting in your mighty right hand and tender loving care.



# L O R D , I W A N T T O K N O W Y O U !

## D A Y T W O

If we want a deep and abiding relationship with God above all else, we must come to know Him by spending time with Him, listening to Him in His Word, and taking the truth to heart the way David did. God has made this possible for us by giving us His final revelation—the Bible—and by giving us himself in the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. It is in God’s Word that we are able to come to know Him. He gives us both the ability to understand His Word and the ability to know Him and love Him by giving us the mind and heart of Christ through the Holy Spirit. But if we are to have a deep relationship with Him, we must seek Him, listen carefully to Him, and follow Him as we are commanded. As God’s representative, Moses conveyed the Lord’s instructions to the people of Israel, so that they might know Him and His heart for them. Read Deuteronomy 6:1-6 and hear God’s heart for His people.

*Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 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. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*

What were the Lord’s instructions to Israel in verses 4-6? Write them word for word. It may seem like busy work, but slowly meditating upon these words as you write will help you take them to heart.

According to verses 1-3, what did God want His people to do? Why? What would be the end result?



We have just read one of the pivotal passages in the Old Testament, called the *Shema*. In it, God has painted a vivid picture of himself, His authority, His character, and His care for His people. He helps us know Him and what kind of relationship He desires to have with us. Imagine for a moment that you are sitting at the feet of Moses, and that Jehovah—the Great I AM, the God of the universe—is speaking to you through him. Ask the Lord to meet you right where you are. Ask Him to help you draw near to Him. It is difficult to settle down, quiet your heart, and seek after the one true God. There are many obstacles and hindrances to spending time with the Lord. Our hearts and minds run after every other thing. What are the obstacles and hindrances that keep you from spending the time you need to spend with the Lord?

Thoughts?

Pressures?

Things?

Circumstances?

Temptations?

Distractions?

Difficult People?

Desires?

Habits?

Hurts?



Let's take a closer look at the law. The law was a gift to God's people. It pointed them to Jesus. Paul tells us, "*the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 3:24-26 NASB). We are not made right with God by obeying the law, but through faith in Jesus! And in Christ, Paul argues, we are free from the law. But this does not mean that we can do whatever we want. Even though as Christians we are not under the law, the law still reveals to us things about God's moral character and helps us to know Him. And, when we put our faith in Jesus, God writes His character on our hearts (Jer. 31:33) and gives us the power to live for Him. In other words, He gives us the heart of Christ. So we see the law through the lens of Christ.

God uses His law in our lives even now. The law can serve to help open our blind eyes, our corrupt minds, and our hard hearts to see God's holy, perfect, righteous character (and our woeful shortcomings). In seeing God (and ourselves) in the Old Testament, we can come to understand Him and His holiness more and gain a much deeper and greater appreciation of what He has done for us in Christ in the New Testament.

So what is the law? Generally speaking the law refers to decrees found in the first five books of the Bible—the stipulations God gave the nation of Israel when He entered into covenant with them. Understanding *covenant* helps us in our understanding of God's heart in the law. Dr. Thomas Schreiner, in his article, "Why We Must Understand the Covenants to Understand the Bible," writes:

“The covenants are crucial . . . because they are the backbone of the storyline of the Bible. The Bible isn’t a random collection of laws, moral principles, and stories. It is a story that goes somewhere; it is the story of redemption, the story of God’s kingdom. And the story unfolds and advances through the covenants God made with his people. If we don’t understand the covenants, we will not and cannot understand the Bible because we won’t understand how the story fits together.”<sup>1</sup>

(For further study, greater clarity, and a quick survey of the covenants in the Scriptures, Thistlebend recommends reading this article in its entirety. See endnote.)



We are going to take a look at the law as given in the Ten Commandments, which are recorded in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Look up this passage in your Bible and list the commandments.

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1 | 6  |
| 2 | 7  |
| 3 | 8  |
| 4 | 9  |
| 5 | 10 |

Think through the Ten Commandments. Do you think they reveal the voice of a judgmental, condemning God or a God with a heart of love for His children? (Review Deuteronomy 6:3.)

Choose one of the commandments and explain how it might be an expression of God’s love for us.

Think about some of your parents’ rules when you were growing up. How did you feel about those rules? Why?

If you have children, what are some of the rules you have put in place to protect your children? Why do you have these rules? Why do you think it is important to enforce them?



The Ten Commandments are an expression of God's righteousness and His love for us. Our parents' rules when we were children were an expression of their love for us as well. We may not have liked them much at the time, but now that we can see they were in place to guard and protect us, we have a different attitude about them. The Ten Commandments also help us know right from wrong. They give us understanding of God's character and help us know Him for who He really is and not merely what we make Him out to be. He is God, He is our creator. We are to approach God on His terms, and when we do, we are blessed. Read Psalm 19:7-11 and underline the blessings available for us as we earnestly seek after Him by following Him and obeying His Word.

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.  
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.  
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Close in prayer by thanking the Lord for His Word, His law, and His heart of love for you. Ask Him to make himself known to you and to fill you with love for Him and His Word.

### **TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART**

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

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

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

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



# L o r d , I W a n t t o H e a r Y o u !

## D A Y T H R E E

God continually reminded the Israelites that He was their God, the one and only God, the one who had saved them from their enemies and who had prepared a beautiful land for them: “*I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians*” (Ex. 6:7); “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Ex. 20:1-2); “*And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people*” (Lev. 26:12). They were His people, His treasured and holy possession. He was faithful to keep His covenant of love with them. And God rightly desired their complete love and obedience to Him alone.

According to the apostle Paul, God wants us to learn by observing His relationship with Israel and their response to Him. “*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come*” (1 Cor. 10:11). God’s promise is to love, provide for, protect, and deliver us into paradise. Even though God’s promises are not contingent upon our performance, He does require our participation: that we seek after Him and set ourselves apart to Him and Him alone, to love and revere Him, and to serve and obey Him. If we are going to do this, we must draw near to Him—hearing His heart, knowing His thoughts, and following His ways. But this all begins with listening—listening with ears that can hear, or in other words, listening by faith, which is a listening that produces obedience. Moses pleaded with God’s people to listen in this way.

Read again the words of the Shema and the verses that follow. We read some of these verses yesterday, and although it may seem repetitious, it’s very good for our souls to repeat the important things. These verses were repeated often by the people of Israel. Be careful not to skim because of the familiarity, but take these words to heart.

*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. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*  
(Deut. 6:4-9)

As we review the Lord's instructions to Israel and to us in verses 4-6, do you wonder if we even can keep these commands? If we can't, should we even try? Why or why not?



**Hear.** Has someone ever asked you, “Can you hear me?” Or have you ever been on the receiving end of, “You’re not listening to me!”? Perhaps someone has told you, “Heed this warning . . .” What is the difference in English between the words *hear*, *listen*, and *heed*? In the first sentence, the meaning is pretty basic. The questioner simply wants to know if you can hear her voice. But in the second statement, the meaning of *listen* is more charged. The person is implying you are not paying attention, or perhaps you are not understanding what is being said. The third example, with *heed*, is the most pointed, because heeding something is paying strict attention and doing what is asked. It is a hearing of obedience. According to *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, all these English meanings are wrapped up in the single Hebrew word *shema*, which means “to hear with attention or obedience, to give undivided listening attention.”<sup>2</sup> *Shema* is the word Moses uses in Deuteronomy 6:4 when he commands, “*Hear, O Israel!*”

Moses was a prophet. He spoke for God. The true prophets were men whom God had chosen to speak through to His people of things to come or to warn them that they were off course and that they had stopped listening to God and needed to repent, draw near to God, and listen to Him. All listened to what Moses had to say, but not many truly heard him. In light of all we have read so far today, take a moment to say a quiet prayer in your heart before you continue. Ask the Lord to help you listen and follow Him with undivided attention and humble obedience.



**Love.** Deuteronomy 6:5 commands, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*”? The word translated *love* in Deuteronomy 6 is the Hebrew word *ahav*, meaning “to love, desire, delight, like, be fond of, covet, be beloved, amiable, be a passionate lover.”<sup>3</sup> This word can be used for a whole range of things, from the love between a man and woman (Eccles. 9:9 and Song of Sol. 3:1-4) to a love of food (Gen. 27:14). Our English word *love*, with all of its vagueness and various intensities, probably corresponds well to the Hebrew word *ahav*.<sup>4</sup> A particularly intense meaning of *ahav* is used to describe the love we should have toward God. In Deuteronomy the command “*Love the LORD your God*” occurs many times (for example, 6:5; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; 30:6). The psalmist employs the word many times in Psalm 119 to express his delight in God’s Word. And sometimes the intensity of the word can reach a divine level, when the word is used to describe the way that God loves us, as when God says in Jeremiah: “*I have loved you with an everlasting love*” (31:3).

The love God commanded in Deuteronomy 6 entails giving your full devotion to the one who alone is God. The love required is not mere outward obedience; it is a deep affection, a deep loyalty;

it is true love. This love is to be demonstrated: 1) with all your heart—with all your thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires; 2) with all your soul—with all your life, your being; 3) with all your might—with all your strength and effort. With everything in you, you are to love God.

Write a short prayer on a sheet of paper and place it in a drawer in your bedroom or desk. Ask the Lord to help you truly love Him and to reveal any areas in your life where you may be deceived by your emotions, intellectual belief, or rituals. Put all of your trust in Him. He is the only one who can grow your capacity to love.



**God's Lovingkindness.** If you were to look at all the instances of *ahav* in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, you would notice that while it can be used of God's love from time to time, it is usually used in reference to humans loving someone or something. In speaking of God's love, the Old Testament typically uses the important term *hesed*. Though people can love in this manner, the word is most often used to describe the way that God loves,<sup>5</sup> and for good reason. Isaiah 54:10 helps us see the special nuance of this word: "*For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness [hesed] will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken*" (NASB). This kind of love is more constant, more stable than the mountains themselves.<sup>6</sup> When used of the Lord, this word means that His covenant love is absolutely unwavering. It is not conditional. It will not change. It remains loyal to the objects of His love.

Take a few moments to think on God's lovingkindness (*hesed*) as the psalmist did in Psalm 48:9: "*We have thought on your lovingkindness [hesed], O God*" (NASB). Think about the fact that God unwaveringly loves you.

How does it make you feel that God is absolutely loyal to you and will never change that allegiance? How might that change your image of God and who He is to you?

Do you have a hard time hearing God's Word as His love for you? What are some reasons that might be? If He is your heavenly Father, how important is it for you to hear and understand and receive what He has given to you in His Word?

If you were to take these truths to heart—that God loves you perfectly with mercy and grace and lovingkindness—what might that mean for your life today? What adjustment might you need to make in your thinking and prioritizing? Write some of your thoughts.



The prophets in the Old Testament were often disregarded, and many times they were even put to death by God's people, not unlike God's very own Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. These messengers of God were delivering an unpopular message that was often drowned out by more appealing and clever sounding rhetoric. The prophets asked hard questions, they spoke the truth plainly, and they gave stern warnings with the intention of drawing God's people back to Him and onto the path of righteousness. But most people did not hear. It can be almost impossible to draw near to God, to get past unseen but real barriers. Ask the Lord to open your ears to hear and your eyes to see what may be keeping you from drawing closer to Him.

What can distract you or pull you away from listening to God and focusing on Him?

What "messages" do you find yourself listening to instead of listening to God and heeding His Word in your life? Make notes beside each category.

Thoughts or fears

Goals, achievements, dreams, or ideals

Pressures from the church or the culture

Things or People

Take these things to the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to give you ears to hear His voice in His Word and grace to respond in obedience.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# L o r d , I W i l l S e e k Y o u !

## D A Y F O U R

The Lord commands us to seek after Him with all of our being, which includes praying and pouring out our hearts to Him. His Word tells us He hears the prayers of His people. God answered David's pleas, and He tells us that He will answer ours as well. Further still, the Father makes himself responsible for our love for Him, which in turn causes us to seek Him. Scripture is clear what the Lord will do with the hearts of those who are His: "*And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live*" (Deut. 30:6). Jeremiah 31:31-34 affirms the Lord's work in our hearts:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Understanding more fully what the Lord says *He* is going to do with our hearts and *our* responsibility to do what He has commanded us to do, we can learn to earnestly seek after God like David, whom God describes as a man after His own heart. From the pen of this shepherd-king, we hear his heart's desire:

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! 2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! 4 You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. 5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. 7 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. 8 I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! 9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. 10 With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander*

*from your commandments! 11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. 12 Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! 13 With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. 14 In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. 16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. (Ps. 119:1-16)*

Who does David say is blessed and how does he describe them (vv. 1-3)?

Underline the words David used to refer to the law in the above passage. David makes a plea that his ways would be established to keep God's commands (v. 5). What would be your plea? How would you describe your heart? Do you find that your heart is lukewarm, apathetic, or disinterested in seeking after the Lord? What attitudes of the flesh need to be put to death? What do you need to confess to the Lord?



If we truly long to know and love the Lord with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength as God commands in His Word, we must actively seek after this deep love relationship with Him. Be we must always remember our ability to love Him comes from Him. Jesus also affirms God's law as one of love. *"And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets'"* (Matt. 22:37-40). Although Jesus summarized the law into two commandments, He by no means discounted or marginalized it. These words are included in three of the four gospels.

Write out Matthew 5:17.



Let's now take time to focus on allowing God's Word to penetrate our hearts as it did David's. We are going to camp in Psalm 119 today and tomorrow. This psalm is such a beautiful picture of the law of love and spending time in it is a great opportunity to immerse and saturate ourselves with God and His Word. The psalmist, believed by many to be David, wrote this psalm as an acrostic poem. He included twenty-two sections, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, with each verse in each section beginning with the respective letter of the Hebrew alphabet. We looked at the first two sections earlier in today's lesson (vv. 1-16), but now we're going to examine them and the following five sections more closely.

I ask you to sensitively and meditatively enter this psalm as you might a garden. As you linger, you will find much depth and more than a glimpse into David's view of Scripture. What you will be doing today and tomorrow will take additional time—worthwhile time—so you may want to set aside extra time in your schedule for it. From verses 1-48, make lists under the following three categories. I will help you get started in this process by listing the verses for the first category and giving an example for each category. There is such a great reward for spending time in God's Word!

1. Record David's **petitions, requests, and pleas** in verses 17-48. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 49-88.)

Example: v. 17 *Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.*

v. 18

v. 19

v. 22

v. 25

v. 26

v. 27

v. 28

v. 29

v. 31

v. 33

v. 34

v. 35

v. 36

v. 37

v. 38

v. 39

v. 41

v. 43

2. Record what David says he **has done or has determined to do with regard to the law** in verses 17-48. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 49-88.)

v. 22 *I have kept your testimonies.*

3. Record David's **feelings toward God and toward the law** in verses 17-48. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 49-88.) Additional writing space is available on the next page.

v. 20 *My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.*

## TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# L O R D , I W I L L S E E K Y O U E A R N E S T L Y !

## D A Y F I V E

God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Spending time immersing ourselves in His Word and meditating upon it truly transforms our hearts, our minds, and our lives. David clearly understood this. He affirms it in Psalm 1:1-3: "*Blessed is the man [whose] . . . 2 delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*" If we are to truly seek the Lord earnestly, we must be willing to make the investment. So make it your purpose to seek Him earnestly. Go forth by faith in God's grace, trusting in God's ways and not man's, and reap a bountiful harvest! Read the passage from Psalm 119 below. First circle every occurrence of the words *law* and *word* and their synonyms.

*Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. 90 Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. 91 By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants. 92 If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. 93 I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. 94 I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts. 95 The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies. 96 I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad. 97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. 98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. 99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. 100 I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. 101 I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. 102 I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. 103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. (Ps. 119:89-104)*

Now quietly meditate on these verses. Consider what David says about God and His Word. Where does David place His trust and in what does He delight? Go back and highlight each occurrence of David's love and delight in God's Word.

From the previous passage, what do you learn about the benefit and protection of choosing to place your delight in the law of God? Where do you find yourself placing your affections? Where do you place your trust?

Observing the psalmist's attitude towards God's Word and where He places his trust, how can you adjust your thinking? List a few practical and specific examples.



Just as you did yesterday, we are going to spend time in Psalm 119. Follow the instructions under the following headings according to the verses in Psalm 119:105-136. (Use an additional sheet of paper if necessary.) You will be amazed at the fruit that will come from your investment. God transforms our minds as we renew them by meditating on His Word.

1. Record David's **petitions, requests, and pleas** in verses 105-136. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 137-176.)

2. Record what David says he **has done or has determined to do with regard to the law** in verses 105-136. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 137-176.)

3. Record David's feelings toward God and toward the law in verses 105-136. (If you are able, continue this process for verses 137-176.)



Review today's verses from Psalm 119 and use some of them as a springboard for a letter to God. Write it out on your prayer journal page so you will be able to refer back to it at the end of the study and see how the Lord answered you. In your letter to Him, consider asking Him to help you hear His voice, receive His lovingkindness, and know Him intimately as you earnestly seek after Him. May you truly enter into a love relationship with Him that you never dreamed would be possible.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

## DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

### **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# My Soul Thirsts for You

*My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Ps. 63:1b)*

**D**usty. Dry. Wasteland. David was alone and isolated in the wilderness of Judah. His longing for God intensified in the midst of the desolate place in which he found himself. His realization that nothing other than God could ever quench his thirst sharpened. He knew that he was dust, good for nothing apart from God's grace, just like the land around him. As a descendant of Adam, he had been an enemy of God, a rebel, a fool. If God had not sought him out, he would have been cast off and destined for eternal destruction. David had a deep understanding of the sin condition of mankind: that each had been brought forth in iniquity, all would go astray, no one would seek after God, and all were without hope apart from God's merciful intervention. He penned these very words: *"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. . . . 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one"* (Ps. 14:1, 3).

David was in the desert fleeing from his son Absalom who was seeking to take his life. He experienced the ongoing consequences of his former sins and perhaps was even reminded of the words that Nathan the prophet spoke to him: *"Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. 11 Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house'"* (2 Sam. 12:9-11). The barrenness of the desert and the vivid reminder of his past sins brought David a new awareness of his sinfulness and his desperate need for God.

Interestingly, this desperation didn't produce despair, but desire! Seeing the ugliness of his sin caused him to long for the Lord all the more. Every heartache deepened his desire; every pang



increased his longing, pressing him closer and deeper in His earnest pursuit of God and His righteousness. This faithful man learned in these situations not to wallow, but to worship, not to drown in his sorrows, but to thirst after God. Not only did David's soul thirst for God, but even his flesh yearned for God.

All of us are sinners. Apart from God's grace, where would we be? Even *with* His grace we struggle. What about you? What about the soil of your heart? Is the Word of God falling like rain into tender, moist soil, or is your heart becoming dry and dusty? Is God's Word being choked by selfish desires, fear, or the worries of this world? When persecution or difficulties arise, do the truths of Scripture evaporate from your mind in the heat of the trial? Are you beaten down by your circumstances, crying out "enough already" or "poor me," instead of "*woe is me; I am a man of unclean lips amongst a people of unclean lips*" (Isa. 6:5).

We can become so accustomed to our sin patterns and unaware of a hardening heart, that instead of turning to thirst more after God, we wander away from God and fill ourselves with empty or even harmful things. If we're tired, angry, frightened, or hurting, we might shut down, put up walls, or hide. If we are to thirst after God and His righteousness, we must identify, confess, and turn from our unrighteous ways that cause us to run *from* God instead of *to* God.

So what are some of these unrighteous ways? Do you think more highly of yourself than others? Perhaps you think your children are more well-behaved, better dressed, more clever, or smarter than other people's children. Are you a lover of money, a seeker of security, or an accumulator of wealth? Do you feel uncomfortable around those whose hearts seem fully surrendered to and engaged with God? Have you become an empty pretender, well-schooled in the externals, having the outward appearance of loving God, but inwardly denying His kingship over your life? Do you seek gratification in temporal things? Are you discontent, high-minded, or blinded with pride? Do you struggle to keep your word? Do you love ease and pleasure more than God? Do you struggle with self-control, always longing for more but never truly satisfied? Are you gluttonous? Lazy? Controlling? Stubborn or willful? Do you want position, power, or prestige—and at times willing to do anything to get it?<sup>1</sup>

Does anything on this list describe you? No doubt something strikes a cord, for we all are sinners and none of us are exempt. The apostle Paul quoted David when he wrote his letter to the Romans, saying that no one is righteous (Rom. 3:10-18). But God made a way where there was no way for those who would look to His Son for salvation and believe. When we look to Christ and confess our



sin, we can and will be washed, cleansed, and purified from all unrighteousness. Jesus cried out to the crowd and to us, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”* (John 7:37-38). Have you come to this well? Do you come to this well daily? Do you drink from it deeply by faith and allow Him to pour its living water over you? The Lord longs for us to come to Him, to desire His character and His righteousness above all, and to live a life with one focus, one purpose, one God, one Spirit—all so that we will know and experience Him and overflow with Him.

If the river of living water is going to freely and fully flow through us, we want to continue to drink in the river of life (Christ) and put off our sinful ways by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind”* (Eph. 2:1-3). But we are not to be like the sons of disobedience. James 4:17 says, *“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”* If we say we know God, we must walk in step with the Spirit. If we know God’s Word, are we being careful to follow it, worshiping Him in Spirit and in truth? Do we take God at His Word? Is there an area in your life that needs to be brought in line with what Scripture teaches? There are no shortcuts, but God has given us the Spirit. We must walk by the Spirit that now dwells in us as believers. If we attempt to take shortcuts around the pain of facing and confessing our sin for what it is, we will not know the blessings of those whose sin has been forgiven. We learn in 1 John 1:8-9, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Most people are able to see other people’s sins and weaknesses more clearly than their own. Although we may have a better radar for the shortcomings of others, we all see with clouded vision. It’s key for us to ask the Lord to give us eyes to see our *own* sin. And it’s equally important to ask Him to help us see our sin through the eyes of Christ. We need Jesus’ help to look at our sin honestly and bravely so that we can see it for what it truly is, confess it, and turn from it, remembering *“we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb. 4:15-16).



It's a comfort to know we have not been left alone to deal with the condition of our hearts. We have no power in ourselves to overcome sin, but God has provided a way. When we surrender our lives to Christ, He gives us the power to overcome that sin by the Holy Spirit and by His grace. So let us leave our old ways, our human thinking, our youthful passions, our agendas, and our desires. Let us humble ourselves, submit to God, and draw near to Him, saying with our all, "Lord, your will be done." It is not for us to direct our own steps. If we are going to enter into a deep, abiding love relationship with our heavenly Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, and if we are going to remain in love with Him as we lay ourselves at His feet, we must acknowledge that He is God and that He is *our* God. Let us look to Jesus to give us a broken, contrite, and teachable heart. Let us ask Him to help us draw near to God and confess any sin He reveals in our lives, and let us trust in Him and His power to help us turn from our old ways and walk in His ways.

In the lesson this week we will ask the Lord to help us learn how to keep our hearts tender towards Him and incline our souls to thirst for Him. As we draw near to God, He will draw near to us, meet us right where we are, and show us the pattern and posture of humble, holy repentance to develop a more transparent, trusting, and intimate relationship with Him. It is a relationship that, by His grace, will impact every area of our lives and satisfy our thirst and longings for Him at the deepest level. The soul like David's says to the Lord, "Lord, I know you love me, and you know that I love you; I put all of my trust in you and your power to enable me to love you the way that you love me. You are everything I need for life and godliness. Help me stand under the overflow of your love and grace. Help me drink in your living water to the full. You are my life, my all." Trust in Christ—not in your love for Him, not in your faith, not in the approval of others, and not in your performance, efforts, or strengths. Trust in Christ alone—He is the river of living water. *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. 8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit"* (Jer. 17:7-8). May you be able to say along with David, *"My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water"* (Ps. 63:1).



# U n r i g h t e o u s n e s s

## D A Y T W O

If we are to truly hunger and thirst after God and His righteousness, we must flee unrighteousness. As believers indwelt by the Spirit, the Lord is working in our lives to turn us from unrighteousness towards His righteousness. Always, at all times, no matter what, the Lord is tenderly and lovingly discipling us by His Holy Spirit in His Word, in our relationships, and in our life circumstances. We want to be alert and actively engaged with Him in this process so that we can be purposeful and intentional in our sanctification. We want to follow David's example. Even with His weaknesses, he was a faithful man, enabled by God, who sought after righteousness and endeavored to do the will of God. We must identify, confess, and turn from our unrighteous ways and from making ourselves the center of our lives. None of us is righteous apart from Christ. Let's look first at what Paul says in Romans 3.

*As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. 13 Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. 14 Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. 15 Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known. 18 There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom. 3:10-18)*

Who does Paul say is righteous? Record how Paul describes unrighteous people (vv. 10-12), word for word.

How might we describe our unrighteous deeds (or our deeds apart from Christ)?



If we are to identify, confess, and turn from our unrighteous ways, it's important for us to fully comprehend what unrighteousness looks like so we can be more discerning. Look at how Paul describes it in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. (NIV)*

What about this list stands out most to you? Does anything here describe anyone you know or the character of the culture today? What sins try, test, or even plague your heart on a reoccurring basis? Is there anything *not* on this list that comes to mind?



It isn't news to say that the culture around us is in swift decline, becoming increasingly godless and immoral. However, we often aren't aware of how much we are impacted by it, and we all need to be reminded to take a look at our lives and see what they say about what we believe. We live in a day and age when the church in America has been so profoundly influenced by the world that it often can be hard to distinguish between the two. We think that because we believe something in our heads, then we believe it in our hearts and are living it with our lives. But our lives and our attitudes reflect much more accurately what we truly believe.

Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any place where you have knowingly or unknowingly bought into a lie, succumbed to the ways of the world, indulged your flesh, or been deceived by the devil. Read Romans 1:18-32 and mark anything that stands out, speaks to your heart, or describes you. Make notes.

Paul says the wicked suppress the truth in unrighteousness. My heart broke when I read the first chapter of Romans for the first time as a believer. Although this passage describes unbelievers—those who reject God, deny Christ, and blaspheme the Holy Spirit—my heart grieves when I see how unbelieving my own heart can be. My sinful flesh still remains and it resists the truth. The sin-corrupted flesh wars against the Spirit, and this remaining sin can cause us to have a similar sinful response to God and His Word.<sup>3</sup>

How are you responding to God and His Word? In what areas might you have suppressed His truth in unrighteousness by doing things your way or man's way? Is there anything else from this passage that you can relate to? Can you identify with this verse? *"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened"* (v. 21)?



Remember, even when we know God, we do not fully see our sin as God sees our sin. Our perspective is limited; we can't comprehend the gravity of the offense or the magnitude of the rebellion that it is. And we wouldn't be able to handle it if we could. But, O! Our great God! He is loving, merciful, and always kind, and His work in our lives is to free us from the bondage and pain that we experience because of indwelling sin. Understand that everything the Lord brings into, permits, or withholds from our lives, even the sins that we commit, He works together for our good and His glory. It is best then that we humbly and willingly submit to His work in our lives, knowing that our loving Father disciplines His children. He disciplines us in our process of sanctification.

Read Hebrews 12:7-11. See the heart of a loving Father. List the purpose and benefits of discipline.



Ask the Lord to help you begin to see your sin as He sees your sin, even though it may be painful. Ask Him to search your heart and give you eyes to see your sin through His heart of love and truth. This may require fasting and much prayer, along with patient, faithful waiting. As the Lord reveals your sin, be quick to agree with Him and confess it. Trust in Christ to fully forgive you. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"* (1 John 1:9-10). It might be necessary to also confess to and seek to reconcile with others who may have been wronged or impacted by your sin.

As you consider your heart condition, you may wonder what to do about the unrighteousness the Lord has identified. You may be tempted to despair, but be encouraged. If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. You are no longer to think of yourself as the old man or woman you once were. Nor are you to identify with or seek to satisfy the passions that belong to that old self. You have died with Christ, and now Christ lives within you (Gal. 2:20). You are to die to your self-centered wants,

desires, fears, concerns, ways, and feelings so that you can live according to the wants, desires, and ways of Christ. The old self was crucified with Christ in order that your body of sin might be put to death. You no longer need to be enslaved to it (Rom. 6:6-7). If that thing that held a grip on you and controlled you has died, then you have been set free. Walk forward in grace and truth in the power of Christ in you. You must see yourself for who you are now in Christ. The life you live in the flesh you must now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you (Gal. 2:20). He has given you the power to overcome sin by His Spirit and His grace.



Read 2 Corinthians 5:11 and Hebrews 4:14-16. Share your heart with the Lord. Include your disappointments, discouragements, etc. Ask Him for whatever you need or desire and be specific. This prayer of confession from the Puritans may serve as a model for our own confession.

Holy Lord, I have sinned times without number, and been guilty of pride and unbelief, of failure to find thy mind in thy Word, of neglect to seek thee in my daily life. My transgressions and short-comings present me with a list of accusations, but I bless thee that they will not stand against me, for all have been laid on Christ. Go on to subdue my corruptions, and grant me grace to live above them. Let not the passions of the flesh nor lustings of the mind bring my spirit into subjection, but do thou rule over me in liberty and power.<sup>4</sup>

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# U n r i g h t e o u s n e s s   o r   R i g h t e o u s n e s s ?

## D A Y   T H R E E

Jesus is the truth. So let us hunger and thirst for the truth in our desert culture. In your thirst for God and His righteousness, it is profitable to take time to reflect on how our hearts are responding to God's Word when we read or listen to it. We want to be like the blessed man in Psalm 1:

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (vv. 1-6).*

Do you delight in the law of the Lord? Do you meditate on God's Word day and night?



Let's ask the Lord to help us examine our hearts closely and reveal how our indwelling sin impacts our ability to trust and obey God and His Word. We want to ask Him to show us what happens to the Word of God when it falls upon the soil of our hearts so that we can be aware of our responses. This is not to condemn, but to protect. Proverbs 4:23 instructs us to “*keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*” Read Mark 4:3-9 below. First ask yourself what kind of heart you have and then consider the questions that follow.

*Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. 9 And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

Only one out of the four soils Jesus describes is considered good. According to this parable, if you are a believer, you are the good soil. However, this parable can very effectively be used by Christians to examine their hearts as well. He says to those whose soil is good, *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”* We must listen carefully, consider what we hear, and take it to heart so it will produce fruit in our lives. Let’s ask ourselves a few questions to help us see how we respond to God’s Word.

Do I sacrifice my time to invest in God’s Word on a daily basis?

Does the Word fall into deep, rich soil?

Is the Word choked by the worries of the world or the desire for riches?

When persecution or difficulties arise, do the words of God seem to lose their meaning or their impact on my thinking?



In Matthew 5:3-6, Jesus says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* David’s heart reflects this in Psalm 63:1 when he says, *“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.”* Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness? Let’s ask the Lord to use His Word to till our hearts and help us observe our response to the truths in God’s Word.

Read Matthew 5. This is the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount. (Tomorrow we will read the remainder in Matthew 6-7). This passage is not to be taken simply as a set of instructions from Jesus. It’s much more than that—it’s the kingdom of God. It’s the heart of the law and a glimpse into what true righteousness looks like.<sup>5</sup> As you read, ask yourself (and the Lord) if there is any unrighteousness, including self-righteousness, in your life that is addressed in this passage. This is not meant to discourage you or overwhelm you. Jesus loves you and has forgiven you; you are no longer to identify with your remaining sin, because you are now a new person in Christ! At the same time, the Lord calls us to actively work to put off our old sinful ways and walk according to His ways by His grace. Ask the Lord to give you peace as you read, knowing that He loves you right where you are. Look to Him to give you a humble, teachable heart and to trust in His grace and not in your own ability. Draw near to God, confess any sin that you may see in your life, and trust in Him and His power to help you turn from your old ways and walk in His ways.

What do you need to bring before the Lord or confess to Him?

Where do you need to adjust your thinking or your ways?



Consider the fruit of righteousness that springs from a heart that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Believers have the Spirit of God within them to help them walk in obedience to God's Word and by faith to consciously choose to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them in thought, word, and deed. It is a priceless blessing to experience how God increases the sweetness of His Word and our longing for Him as we thirst after Him and His righteousness.

Boldly ask the Lord to use His Word to till your heart and nurture it so that spiritual fruit will spring forth in your life by His grace to:

- Trust God.
- Believe His Word.
- Obey His Word.
- Walk in the Spirit by His grace.
- Demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).
- Die to self, leave everything, pick up your cross and follow Jesus.
- Display a sound mind and disciplined, orderly life.
- Manifest a humble, holy, servant's heart.
- Be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel.
- Love God, His Word, and others.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# C l e a n s e d   f r o m   U n r i g h t e o u s n e s s

## D A Y   F O U R

Be encouraged! When we see our sin and our weaknesses afresh, often we are grieved and our hearts become heavy laden. We can easily fall into despair. God has compassion on us. *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise,”* (Ps. 51:17). When we confess our unrighteousness and believe in His forgiveness, we are cleansed and washed clean! Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Read Psalm 51:1-10.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. 6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. 8 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. 9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

Who does David say that he has sinned against? What does he ask of God?



Read Psalm 32. What does this psalm say that God will do for us? Who will deliver us out of our sin? What is our responsibility (vv. 5-6)?

First John 1:8-9 echoes this message. *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*



Read Matthew 6-7, the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount. Again ask the Lord to use His Word to till the soil of your heart and help you observe your response to the truths in God's Word. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because there is confession of sin and repentance. You can be transparent and honest with the Lord about your sin. Jesus loves you and has forgiven you; you no longer need to identify with your remaining sin; you are now a new person in Christ! But that doesn't mean that you don't need to identify your sin! Openly confess any wrong attitude in your heart or where you struggle with your thoughts, words, or deeds. Write your confession below.



As believers we need to remind ourselves and each other of the basis of our forgiveness and encourage one another daily toward a continual and active trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We must trust in Christ—not in our love for Him, not in our faith, not in our strength—but in Christ alone and what He has done on the cross. We want to be able to say, “O God, you are my God!” The following are some of the heart responses we have discussed that will help us develop a deeper, more intimate communion with the Lord.

1. Seek after the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
2. Hunger and thirst for His righteousness instead of focusing on the things of the world or trusting in your own unrighteousness.
3. Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal any ungodly way in you.
4. Confess your sins.
5. Approach the Father with confidence, knowing that there is nothing to fear.
6. Trust in God and in His Word and in His power.
7. Believe God's Word over your feelings and over what you think is right or best.
8. Pray unceasingly—in other words, pray in the morning at the start of your day and then throughout your day and whenever you need wisdom, guidance, strength, or help.
9. Resolve to do things God's way.
10. Practice walking by the Spirit. Ask someone to help you understand this if you are unfamiliar with what this means. We all are learning!



My hope and prayer for anyone in this study, including myself, is that the study would not merely strengthen our knowledge and understanding of God's Word, but help bring us into a deep, abiding love relationship with our heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. This excerpt of a prayer adapted from the *Valley of Vision* is a prayer I hope all of us will pray.

Give me a deeper trust, that I may lose myself to find myself in Thee, the ground of my rest, the spring of my being. Give me a deeper knowledge of Thyself as saviour, master, lord, and king. Give me deeper power in private prayer, more sweetness in Thy Word, more steadfast grip on its truth. Give me deeper holiness in speech, thought, action, and let me not seek moral virtue apart from Thee.<sup>6</sup>

May we learn more than ever how to remain in Him and in love with Him as we lay ourselves at His feet, acknowledging, as David did in Psalm 63:1, “*O God, you are my God.*” Ask the Lord to grant you the grace to know Him, to hear Him, and to seek after Him with great earnest. Ask Him to help you humble yourself before Him to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

May I give you a quick caution as you continue? Beware of your flesh resisting God’s work. Don’t allow negative feelings of apathy, resistance, or even rebellion keep you from following the Lord’s shepherding through this study. Don’t walk forward in your feelings; walk forward in the Spirit by grace through faith. Take Martin Luther’s bold words to heart. “You must learn to call on the Lord. Don’t sit all alone or lie on the couch, shaking your head and letting your thoughts torture you. Don’t worry about how to get out of your situation or brood about your terrible life, how miserable you feel, and what a bad person you are. Instead, say, ‘Get a grip on yourself, you lazy bum! Fall on your knees, and raise your hands and eyes toward heaven. Read a psalm. Say the Lord’s Prayer, and tearfully tell God what you need.’”<sup>7</sup>

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# P o w e r   O v e r   U n r i g h t e o u s n e s s

## D A Y   F I V E

Outside of Christ, we were once dead in our sins and followed the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Listen as Paul describes those who are separated from God by sin.

*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. . . . 11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:1-3, 11-12)*

Now in Christ, we have been made alive. We struggle to comprehend this truth and walk according to it, because we are still impacted by our remaining sin. But now we are alive! Paul goes on to describe our current condition in Christ.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:4-10)*



We read Ephesians 1:3-14 in Lesson One, but take a moment to review it and be reminded that we have been given Christ and every spiritual blessing in Him. Since we have been given Christ, we have been given His righteousness and His power. We are to walk according to His ways, in His power, and by the Spirit, not according to our own devices and desires, in our own strength, or in the flesh. Read the passage from Galatians on the next page and note where our dark, cranky, impatient side comes from.

*For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:17-26)*

Note the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. This is definitely not an exhaustive list. Where do you sense the lingering presence of the deeds of the flesh in your heart? You may not identify with many of these, but maybe you can make a list of your own.

Where do you see the fruit of the Spirit in your life?



We were formerly darkness, dead in our trespasses and sins, walking in the flesh continually, and unable to inherit the kingdom of God. Left to ourselves, we would never have placed our faith in Jesus. Sin had blinded our minds and hearts so much that even if we intellectually believed everything the Bible tells us about Jesus and knew that salvation could be found in no other way, we still would have chosen to turn our backs on God. So God graciously stepped in. He gives saving faith. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9). But when we repent and surrender our lives to Christ, we receive life in the Spirit through His righteousness and become children of the light who can walk as children of the light. Galatians 5:24 says, *“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* Although our indwelling sin remains, and we will continue to sin until we are in heaven, Paul teaches us how to walk in the light and how to put to death the deeds of the flesh. We are now a new creation. We have been given Christ’s righteousness. We are no longer to identify with the deeds of the flesh. What do you think the result would be if you were to learn how to put to death those deeds of your flesh by the power of the Spirit within you? How might your day, your thought life, and your relationships be different?



Read Romans 8:1-14 slowly and carefully, paying close attention to what Paul is saying about the Spirit and the flesh. Note the description or characteristics of each in the columns below.

**Life lived in the flesh**

**Life lived by and in the Spirit**



It is very productive and helpful to know and understand what it looks like to give ourselves over to our flesh and what fruit is produced when we do, in contrast to when we submit to God and the Spirit of Christ. This is a life-long journey of learning to love God, abide with Him, and walk in the Spirit. What are we to do with the flesh? We are to put it to death! There is a paradox in the Christian life, a tension that we live with daily this side of heaven. Based on Romans 8, we can say that a true believer is not “in the flesh”; we are “in Christ.” As a believer in Jesus, we do not walk according the flesh—by definition! So Paul also says in Colossians 3:9-10, “*You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*” We do not walk according to the flesh; the old self is gone. Yet in Ephesians 4:21-24 Paul says, “*Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, . . . put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and . . . be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and . . . put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*” So we must be aware of the great paradox that the flesh is dead and gone, yet we must still put it to death and contend with it daily. This is a battle and we must fight it. (Ephesians 4:17-32, Colossians 3:5-17, and Romans 7 are helpful parallel passages for further reference.)



So how do we fight this battle? Although it’s difficult to give a point-by-point description, here are some helpful tools and guidelines for how to mortify—or put to death—the flesh. (See also John Owen’s *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* and Kris Lungaard’s *The Enemy Within*.)

- Think of this analogy: the flesh is your *old girl*. When she comes to visit—and she will—be alert and do not open the door to her. She will try to manipulate you to let her in; she'll try the back door too. Keep the doors locked tight!
- Entrust yourself to Christ. Ultimately, He is working in you, and you must trust Him, or you will be fighting the battle in your own strength.
- No longer identify with your old nature. "*Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires*" (Eph 4:22).
- Don't provide for your sin or flesh. "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*" (Rom. 13:14).
- Seek to please God and to "*put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph. 4:24).
- Read the Word. This is the best way to begin thinking the way God thinks (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- Resolve to change sinful habits and not satisfy the flesh. Determine practical and concrete steps to move toward those changes. Nothing will change if you just *wish* it to be different.
- Confess your sins to fellow believers and ask them to hold you accountable (James 5:16).
- Pray for yourself and pray for others (James 5:16).
- Ask the Lord to help you recognize your flesh so that you can put it to death and walk in the Spirit. You might begin with something simple, like observing what you do when angry or afraid.
- (The sad part about indwelling sin is that it's not a visitor but a permanent resident.)

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

## DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

### **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# Your Power and Glory

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. (Ps. 63:2)*

**D**o you feel overwhelmed? Do circumstances or relationships seem to spin out of control? We try to do everything we can to keep this from happening! We manage our days, lives, children, and finances in order to keep it all together. Unwittingly, we try to fulfill Christ's all powerful, all knowing role as sovereign ruler, Lord, and king by trying to hold all things together in our own strength. When things seem to be falling apart, we jump through every hoop to get them back together again as fast as we possibly can in order to get back to normal, the status quo, the schedule. Then, when and if everything seems to be back in order, we feel better, breathe a deep sigh of relief, and think, "Life is good." Intellectually we know that we aren't in control, that we *are* weak, inadequate, and powerless, but we don't like feeling that way.

The unknown is way out of our comfort zone! So we manage our schedules, measure what we think we can do, and even manipulate circumstances, often not realizing that we have attempted to take over God's role, tried to assume the lead, and have usurped God's rule and reign. How do we follow the Lord when we are hit broadside with an illness, a financial crisis, the death of a loved one, a betrayal, great personal failure, or all of the above? How do we rest peacefully and quietly—trusting that God Almighty rules and reigns and believing that He is the one who holds all things together—when things seem to be falling apart? What do we do when we don't know where He's leading, when it seems as though He is asking us to do something we don't know how to do, or when we don't have time in our schedule, funds in our account, or the talent or spiritual gifting we think we need?

We must trust all of the details of our world to the wisest, most powerful, and perfect one who rules over the kingdom of God and governs the universe—Jesus Christ. Isaiah the prophet wrote of His role.

*... and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase*



*of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.” (Isa. 9:6-7)*

Writing about God’s reign, the 17th-century hymn writer Johann Friedrich Zihn penned these words, “God is God; he sees and hears all our frailties, all of our troubles, all our tears. Soul, forget not, ‘mid thy pains, God o’er all forever reigns.”<sup>1</sup> He is the *Wonderful Counselor*, the one who knows all things, who is perfect in wisdom. He is the *Mighty God*. No one is stronger, no one is greater, no one is higher. He reigns! He is the *Everlasting Father*. Jesus calls us His children (John 13:33; Heb. 2:13) and as such He provides for us and protects us perfectly. He knows what is best for us, how to care for us, and how to train us. He is the *Prince of Peace*. We were once God’s enemies, but now in Christ we have peace with God. We know that we are one with Him.

King David had to learn to remember God and His power and glory in the midst of each and every circumstance, even when he found himself in the desert. Things were not merely falling apart for him, they *had* fallen apart. His son Absalom (the one that murdered his half brother for raping his sister) had rebelled against his authority, rallied many in Jerusalem to conspire along with him, and attempted to usurp the throne. He then publically shamed his father by engaging in sexual relations with several of his father’s concubines in a tent on the roof of the palace—perhaps the very rooftop where David had once stood watching Bathsheba. David fled Jerusalem along with several of his servants. After he fled, he was publicly cursed, and Shimei, a bitter relative of the former king Saul, threw stones at him. An outcast, a spectacle, a refugee in the desert wilderness of Judah, with his world spinning out of control and shame heaped upon his head, David lifted the eyes of his heart above his circumstances, above the heads of his enemies, and above his feelings and fixed his gaze upon the Lord. David expressed in another Psalm, “*Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. 4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple*” (Ps. 27:3-4).

In his powerlessness, public humiliation, and personal misery, David saw God and His power and His glory. He meditated on Him and worshiped Him in the sanctuary of His love and grace. David remembered with fondness the days of worshipping the Lord within the beauty of His temple, but he no longer needed to do so in a building; his Lord was with him. Affectionately, reverently, and supernaturally his heart sung a song to the beloved of his soul. This is no small matter considering



David's plight. He was not pining for the throne, but for His Lord. The Spirit of God was powerfully at work within David, causing him to glory in God and keeping his flesh in subjection as he worshiped God—Elohim, the great I AM, Jehovah—even as things fell apart around him.

There is only one God, one King, and one Lord. It isn't you and it isn't any other person. David isn't the only one who had to deal with people who desire to have control, power, or glory. Perhaps there is someone in your life who feels the need to be ruling and reigning. They have a subtle (or not-so-subtle) way of seeking to rule over others and control their behavior or ways of doing things. It seems they think their way is the correct or best way to do things, and they want you to do things *that way*. And when you don't do them the "right way," or your way is not in alignment with their expectations, they engage in silent judgment, passive-aggressively letting you know when your behavior isn't meeting the standard. Or perhaps this describes you. On either side, we can be tempted to react.

David learned that all power and glory belong to the Lord. In Psalm 63, he proclaims that God is his God and that he seeks after Him with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. As the circumstances escalate, in the vortex of emotion, and under intense pressure, he doesn't take matters into his own hands or run after the solutions the world has to offer. We witness the beautiful, ardent longing of a man consumed with His Lord with every fiber of his being, clinging to Him with every bit of energy and believing that ultimately God was safely holding him and all things together in His almighty hands. David was confident that he would see God's power and glory. Our heavenly Father knows that this outlook is often times much more easily established in trouble, suffering, and affliction, than in the midst of prosperity, ease, and calm. This is because the pressure of difficult circumstances both drives us to God and more readily refines our hearts. We are blessed to witness the internal, intimate worship of this servant of God as he ran to the fountain of life in the midst of the desert, for he had developed a deep and abiding trust in God and in His Word.

Paul also learned this intimate trust in the Lord, a trust in His power for His glory. He understood that all things, including the tremendous trials and tribulations the Lord had allowed in His life, which at times even felt like a sentence of death, were intended by God to press him to lean into Christ.

*For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us*



*again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. (2 Cor. 1:8-11)*

So what does it look like to display God's glory? We want to make it visible, to make it shine! The glory of the Lord shone brightly through Paul in his great tribulations and as he boasted in his weaknesses. *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 5:16). We want to live in such a way that those who know us well would understand our lives are a picture of God's glory and not our own and that they would give glory to the Lord and not to us. The Lord is with us. He wants to grow us in our ability to know this experientially. As we learn to follow the Lord more and more by faith and fix our eyes upon Him in the midst of our weakness, He will demonstrate His power and majesty before our very eyes and reveal himself to us and to others! Trusting Him, knowing that He is forming us into His very image, He reveals himself to us as the source of all joy, peace, and truth, the Lord of all and God Most High.

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:7-12)*

David is a great encouragement and inspiration. The faithful, truly hope-filled anticipation we see in David's heart to have God and His glory manifested in and through difficult circumstances is powerful and magnifies God. It comes as a result of his earnest, insistent seeking and inquiring of the Lord, of following after Him day after day, of seeking an ever-increasing intimacy with God as a way of life, even in the face of temptation, pressures, and privilege. David is also a great reminder to us to stay close to the Lord. He struggled and even failed severely with this after he was crowned king. He experienced many victories and extraordinary privileges. As David began to enjoy a life of greater position and ease, his attention was tested, his focus drifted, many things pulled at his heart, and his eyes wandered from God. The leisurely benefits of his position ensnared him, and he fell into sin and reaped the consequences. But God didn't leave David there. He sent Nathan to prompt David, and David repented. In Psalm 63 we see the evidence of David's faith journey and his pursuit of a life of



devotion as he professed to earnestly seek after the Lord with all of his heart. He made it clear that God was his singular focus. He followed after the Lord and clung to Him with radical abandon, absolute obedience, and total devotion. David learned that such a posture of repentance was necessary. His example teaches us that we cannot live a life of faith with casual ease.

We all are weak and will struggle. Like David, we will face temptation, trial, and tribulation. The days of greatest ease can be a season of greatest testing. The pursuit of holy, moment-by-moment worship, seeking to glorify God in any and all circumstances, means putting aside self and laying aside our expectations, perspective, and will to humbly acknowledge that the way we see things is limited, faulty, and finite. We must submit ourselves and our will to God's will, admit that we do not think as God thinks nor see as God sees, and bow to the truth that God is always sovereignly accomplishing His perfect will, perfectly. This is dying to what self may want, leaving behind what we have known, denying ourselves to follow Christ, and allowing Him to have His way, in order to see His power and His glory. It may mean that things do seem to fall apart, don't go as planned, or aren't the way we would want them. But as we follow God's Word by His Spirit, step-by-step, Jesus says we will see Him more and more clearly. *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21). But the Christian life is much more than just following a list of rules. It is following Jesus by following His Word by His Spirit. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, said, *"See, we have left everything and followed you"* (Matt. 19:27). Paul said that he left everything as well. He counted all as loss.

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:8-11)*

When you consider everything as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ as Lord and when you can lift your eyes up to the heavens, fix your gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and trust in Him, you can know that it is God at work in your life, because only He can produce these things in you. More and more, He will reveal himself and His power and His glory to you. You



will see His character, His love, and His power lived out before you, through you, in you, and around you, and you will know full well it is Him and not you! May God be glorified! In every circumstance, rest on the Lord entirely, follow Him, trust in His power, and look forward to His glory. We have been given a great gift in our great God. We can rest in His rule.

Just as David sought to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life and to see the beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4), Peter exhorts us to seek the same end, to see the Lord in our day-to-day circumstances and to remember that our God is not contained in a temple made by hands. We must worship Him in spirit and in truth no matter where we are or what the circumstances are, in hope-filled anticipation of seeing and experiencing His glory and power now and later. The more we know and worship God as God, the more we see Him for who He is and ourselves for who we are, and the more we want to seek after Him and His righteousness with all of our heart. God becomes our all in all, shaping us, satisfying our longings, healing our wounds, and manifesting His power and His glory before our eyes in our weakness and in the midst of every circumstance.

As we close today, read this excerpt from Charles Spurgeon.

God's glory is the result of His nature and acts. He is glorious in His character, for there is such a store of everything that is holy and good and lovely in God that He must be glorious. The actions that flow from His character are also glorious; but while He intends that they should display to His creatures His goodness and mercy and justice, He is equally concerned that the glory associated with them should be given only to Himself. Not that there is anything in ourselves in which we may glory; for who makes us different from another? And what do we have that we did not receive from the God of all grace? Then how careful we ought to be to walk humbly before the Lord! The moment we glorify ourselves, since there is room for one glory only in the universe, we set ourselves up as rivals to the Most High. . . . Give to the Lord, all you righteous, give to the Lord glory and strength; give to Him the honor that is due His name.<sup>2</sup>



# God's Power and Glory Seen in Creation

## DAY TWO

Let's take a glimpse at the astounding power of God's Word; a power that magnificently creates, reigns, and transforms; a power that distinguishes Him as the one true God.

*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. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. 6 And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. 8 And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. (Gen. 1:1-8)*

The power of the Lord is infinite and boundless. The Bible begins by saying that God spoke the heavens and the earth into being. Creating out of nothing with a word? That is power, power beyond anything we can fully understand. Today, meditate on the power and might of the Lord, specifically the power of His Word to create.



Read Genesis 1-2:9. Observe the passage closely. Note what God did each day and the method He used to do it. Worship the Lord as you contemplate God's power and glory in creation.

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5

Day 6

Day 7

As you contemplate each day of creation and the means God used, read Psalm 104 and worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth.

The angels witnessed and rejoiced over God's acts of creation. Read Job 38:1-7 and record any notes.



God's people were witnesses of His glory and His great and mighty power on numerous occasions. Read Psalm 78:1-55.

In verses 1-7, what does the psalmist instruct the Israelites to do?

What does he remind them of in verse 8?

Having witnessed God's power and glory firsthand, how do His people respond?

Why did they respond with such apathy and rebellion?

As you make note of their response, you may want to ask yourself, "Do I take God's mighty power for granted?"

God is working His mighty deeds to perform. Make a list of some of the wonders that God performed according to verses 13-31 and 42-55.

Do we remember and recall God's mighty deeds? Do we tell them to our children? Do we take time to meditate upon the mighty ancient acts of God in the Bible so as to believe them, that we would be able to live with bold faith in the present?

Have you ever seen God deliver or direct you in the past? Think of the things the Lord has done for you. List a few.

If you are in a desperate situation, how can you look to God when things seem so unclear?



We have considered God's mighty power in creation and His mighty power in redeeming Israel. Now consider God's mighty power in your redemption and write your thoughts. Close with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# P o w e r   o v e r   C r e a t i o n

## D A Y   T H R E E

By precise and extraordinary miracles God demonstrates the power and authority that He possesses over and above the natural realm. Creation is not ultimately governed by nature, but by God. He alters nature and the order of events whenever He pleases, that He may be acknowledged to be creation's only Lord and Master. Altering the norm dramatically exhibits his dominion. God is God over all, over the birds of the air, over the fish in the sea, and over the wind and the waves. One place where God demonstrates His precision, authority, and power over nature is in 1 Kings 19 when He makes himself known to Elijah.

*And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:11-14).*

God performs these dramatic events for Elijah and then follows them with a gentle whisper, emphasizing that His power and glory are demonstrated not only in the bigness of events, but also in the smallness of a whisper. God makes himself and His sovereignty known throughout His Word so that we might comprehend that He is God and that His creation is not directed or moved by chance, but by His express will and power. Reflect on God's sovereign will and power and consider it in light of the circumstances in your life and in the world around you. What current situation is testing your faith and your belief in God's sovereign love?



Read Mark 4:35-41. Take your time and be very observant as you read this text, even though it may be familiar to you; there is much to learn from this passage. After you have read through the passage once, go back and briefly describe what is happening in the following verses.

Verse 35

Verses 37-38

What do the disciples say?

What does Jesus do? How does He do it?

What does He say to His disciples?

What does it say they were feeling then?

What do they say about Him?

Will we choose great fear or great faith? In what ways do you struggle with the issues the disciples are struggling with in Mark 4, such as fear of the wind and the waves? Explain your thoughts.

How can feelings of fear in the midst of difficult, even terrifying, circumstances be overcome?

Do you have a reverential fear of Jesus? If so, how does reverential fear of Jesus impact the decisions you make? If not, how do you think you could develop this godly, reverential fear?



As you close this day, I'd like to ask you to draw a few conclusions and try to answer the questions that may have been raised. Take a few minutes or so to write and pray through what you have learned about the following:

The power of God and His Word.

Reverent fear and awe of God.

In what ways would understanding, believing in, and remembering God's power impact you and your way of thinking and responding?

Do you think taking the truths about God's power to heart and feeding on them by faith would help you to live according to His Word and not according to your emotions, circumstances, or people's opinions? Specifically, how do you think meditating more on God's power would impact you?

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# God's Power through Jesus

## DAY FOUR

Today we will look at God's power and glory as demonstrated through His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully man. John described Him this way:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:1-5).*

Who was in the beginning with God? What do these verses say about Him? Make a list.



Read John 1:9-18. Who is Jesus according to this passage?

Read Hebrews 1:1-12. Note what is said about Jesus in this passage.



Without realizing it, we can have an incorrect image of who Jesus is in our minds. The image could have been formed from a nativity story we heard when we were toddlers, a crucifix hanging on a bedroom wall, various pastors or preachers on the radio or internet, or years and years of random sound and video bites that build a muddled mosaic of Jesus that may not be at all accurate. Keeping the Hebrews passage in mind, read John 11:1-44. Ask the Lord to help you see Jesus for who He is. Ask Him to correct any false images you have stored over the years and establish right/true images of Christ in your heart. Answer the questions that follow, according to John 11:17-37.

What do you read in verse 17?

What does Martha say in verses 21-24?

What does Jesus say to Martha in verses 25-26?

What does Martha say in response in verse 27?

Specifically identify how Jesus demonstrated His power and glory in John 11 regarding Lazarus.

Is there anything that God cannot do? Anything Jesus cannot do?



Reflect on what you have read. Write a brief description of who Jesus is according to Hebrews 1 and John 11. We don't want to make a "carved" image of Jesus in our minds. We want to know who Jesus is according to the Bible and make sure that we adhere to an accurate, biblical understanding of Jesus in our hearts and minds. Jesus is not merely an idea, a historical figure, or a doctrine. Jesus is King of kings, Lord of lords, Creator, Redeemer, and the Giver of Life. After you have reviewed the passages and recorded what you have read about Jesus, ask yourself, "Who is Jesus to me?"

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# A s c r i b e t o G o d P o w e r a n d G l o r y

## D A Y F I V E

Our God is the God over all. His glory is demonstrated in the midst of each day. John Piper describes His glory as “the radiance of his holiness, the radiance of his manifold, infinitely worthy and valuable perfections.”<sup>3</sup> But do we see it? We are exceedingly blessed as God manifests His glory—the outpouring, overflowing display of His nature, character, worth, and beauty—such that we, His people, can see Him and come to know Him. God’s power and glory will also be revealed not only to us, but to others as we ascribe to Him the glory and power He is due. What could be more wonderful than to have our lives be a display of God’s power and glory? Listen to what David says should be ascribed to the Lord.

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. (Psalm 29:1-2).*

“Ascribe to the Lord” means to attribute to God. What does David tell us to attribute to God?

Read all of Psalm 29. What does this psalm tell you about the Lord?

What do you see again in this psalm about the Word or the voice of the Lord?

Affirm these truths in your heart and mind. Choose one or two verses that speak the truths of God’s might and power to your heart and write them below.



God is all mighty and all powerful. We are to give our worship to Him alone, because He alone is deserving. We are to express our devotion and commitment to God by worshiping Him in word and deed. The psalmist ascribes glory to His name. How does Paul express his worship in Philippians 3:4-14? On the following page, list what Paul says he does and why he says he does it. Observe how he takes the truth to heart and proclaims it to others.

## What Paul does

## Why he does it



According to Philippians 3:8-10, why does Paul count all things as loss?



Fear often rises up as we consider giving something up. Even change itself brings the concerns of the unknown. Remember, “. . . *perfect love casts out fear*” (1 John 4:18). Ask the Lord for His wisdom and insight. What steps can you take in your life to practically apply what you have learned through Paul’s example? What areas in your life need to be counted as loss? Identify them and be specific.



Paul said that he left everything and counted it all loss that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection. God promises to show us His power and His glory as we seek Him, but He doesn’t stop there. We will not just see His power and His glory, we will know it. We will know the same power of which Paul speaks.

We are not merely to worship the Lord for His power and glory as if we look on these things from a distance and admire their beauty in a detached way, like we might with a fine painting. No. We are to enter into worship with all of our being. But we also must recognize it is God’s power and glory that enable us to worship Him in the first place! Paul prays for the Ephesians:

*. . . that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*

*19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:16-19)*

Then Paul makes the astounding statement that God's power is actually at work in us (Eph. 3:20). Pray this prayer for yourself and those you love.



We will share in God's glory someday! Read the following Scriptures and note what you learn.

John 17:22

Romans 8:18-30

1 Peter 1:3-9



Close today by offering the Lord a sacrifice of praise and worship for His extravagant gifts.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

## **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# Your Lovingkindness

*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. (Ps. 63:3-4)*

**T**he Lord can seem so close at times and yet so far. We want to talk with Him, yet He seems out of reach. We cry out, yet we are not sure if He has heard. Our heart reverberates with a longing that we don't know how to satisfy; then a fog settles in, clouding our vision, and the dampness of doubt and mistrust snuffs out our expectations. The longing remains, but now it is weighted with disillusionment. Faith must overcome or our love will fade. We must fight the temptation to question God's goodness and lovingkindness.

Comprehending how much God cares about us or how deeply He loves us can feel well beyond our reach, particularly when we are wrestling with some of the crazy stuff that happens in our lives—not only the big things (like terminal illness, death, divorce, wayward children, etc.), but also the small things. In fact, more than we want to admit, it's often the "small" things that take us down: the disappointments, the nagging thoughts, the lonely nights, the misunderstandings, the unrealized dreams. Insidiously, the incessant minutia of everyday life can whittle away our faith. Unknowingly our weather-worn foundation begins to crumble in disrepair. We know that God's Word repeatedly tells us He loves us and cares for us like a mother cares for her newborn child and that He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus implores, *"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows"* (Luke 12:6-7). But we have such a hard time truly believing this and holding onto this in the midst of trials.

God often administers His love, care, and protection differently than we would. So we think we are trusting Him and His Word, but we are, without realizing it, also applying our own thinking and insight, which causes us to doubt, question, and worry. Our faith teeters because our foundation of belief is unstable. It isn't because there is something wrong with God's love; it is because His perfect



lovingkindness is beyond our comprehension. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways. They challenge and test our faith and contradict our human ways of thinking, which is so good and so necessary! Many people ask how a loving God could allow such things as evil, heartache, and suffering. If we are completely honest, we have to admit we are inclined to interpret love as coddling. We don't like hard work, loneliness, difficulties, trial, tribulation, or anything of the sort. Then when circumstances really take a turn and unfold differently than we expect, when we aren't able to perform to our expectations, or when tragedy strikes, it seems the Lord has allowed us to suffer unnecessarily.

David had come to know God, His Word, and His ways while shepherding sheep, hiding in caves, fighting on the battlefield, and reigning as king. He knew what it was like to be alone with the sheep and alone with his thoughts. He had dealt with the ups and downs of life. He understood aloneness and loneliness, isolation and rejection, faith and fear. As a woman living in the twenty-first century, we may not understand the life of a shepherd, king, or warrior, but our daily challenges and trials may not be as different as we think. Living in a community, being an active member of a church, caring for a husband or children, or working at home or outside the home, our lives may be every bit as challenging. We may find ourselves crying out, "Does anybody care? Does God even care? Lord, do you know the silent, excruciating pain I endure day after day after day? Have you seen? Lord, have you heard what has been said to me? Do you know how lost and confused I feel sometimes and how inadequate I feel? I fall so far short!" Do we dare ask, "Lord, do whatever it takes; I don't want to feel this way anymore"?

There are dynamics that only God knows about and places within us that only He can touch. We may have been a believer for decades, but have an ache or a longing that even knowing Christ hasn't seemed to cure. At times we wonder what is wrong, having the sense that we are the only ones who feel this way. Or we once may have known a deep connection with the Lord, but the trials and tribulations of life have impacted our relationship with Him. Perhaps our trust in Him has been strained. Or maybe we have withdrawn just enough to protect ourselves, but even that little bit has impacted our intimacy with Him.

David definitely understood all of these things. We can hear almost every range of emotion and spiritual expression in his psalms. It seems as though David knew God intimately on many levels, and with great vulnerability, he fearlessly opened up his heart to Him. He learned how much God loved him, and he dwelt confidently, joyfully, and securely within that love. David extolled the Lord for the



glorious and gracious gift of His abundant and steadfast lovingkindness. *“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”* (Ps. 63:3-4). In following after Him earnestly, David experienced God’s tender lovingkindness and declared it to be better than life itself.

God’s love far exceeds any boundary or dimension we can fathom. His love is the most powerful—yet gentle—force in the universe, and it has the power to heal the deepest wound, transform the most deformed life, fill the greatest void, and even bring the dead back to life. Getting our minds or our hearts around this love can seem impossible. Because His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, we are often unaware of His loving and merciful hand at work in our lives. God’s love for us can’t be measured by the circumstances we find ourselves in. Too often, our eyes are fixed on our failures, distracted by our surroundings, or cued into the world’s perspective. Thankfully God’s love is not dependent on us—our love, our understanding, our circumstances, or our ability. He loves us unconditionally. He makes a way where there seems to be no way. But it may not always seem like it.

Your Lord delights in you. He loves you with an everlasting love. You are the apple of His eye, and He is looking forward to spending eternity with you. You have been created in His image, designed to reflect His glory and to enjoy Him forevermore. He promises to be with you wherever you are, to never leave you nor forsake you; there is no place that you can go that He is not there.

He had you in His mind and in His heart before time began. You are His child, and you are precious in His sight. There is nothing you can do that can separate you from His love; in fact, there is nothing anyone can do to separate you from His love. No sin is so horrific that Jesus’ death isn’t sufficient to pay for it. He willingly laid down His life for you. His love for you is not based on your performance, achievement, intelligence, or talent. He has wonderful plans for you, plans to give you a future and a hope. He knows your every thought and the details of your every day. There are no surprises for Him.

This is not so for us. We are not in control. We don’t know the future nor the details. In fact, when our children are born we often wonder who they will become. What will they be like? We ask questions like, “Does he have Grandpa’s eyes?” or “Don’t you think she looks just like Aunt Margaret!” It is much longer, though, before we discover the type of personality this new little person will have, or what their favorite color will be, or what sport they will like. It seems like a lifetime before we see who they become. All children, even though they come from the same parents, are completely unique. As



each child grows and matures, a wonderful creation emerges, with surprises around every corner. As parents, we have a limited role as stewards of what God has given us. We cannot choose our child's temperament, talents, or eye color (at least not yet!). We cannot choose their future, their vocation, or their influence.

This is not the case with our heavenly Father. He has everything planned. He formed you in your mother's womb. Psalm 139:13 says, "*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*" Not only did He know exactly what you would look like, because He hand-picked every characteristic, He also allowed every defect. He knew the day, the hour, and the exact minute of your birth. He knows your every day before you will live it. Yes! God is sovereign over all of these things!

In fact, the Lord has a plan and a purpose for each of our lives, down to the smallest detail, even to the number of hairs on our head at any given moment. The Bible tells us that before the foundation of the world, He chose us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:4). He loved you long, long ago. You are His. He chose you with eternity in mind. He chose you not because you would choose Him, not because you were more special, not because of your ability, beauty, or personality, but because of His perfect wisdom and infinite love. He has carefully watched over you every day of your life. He has caused all things to work together for good in your life, and He has been forming you into the image of His Son. There is no greater joy than to know this love and to believe in it to the very depth of your soul—enough to walk in it.

Can we join the psalmist, not only with our lips, but with our lives, and say, "*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you*" (Ps. 63:1)? Can we say, "I love you, Lord, with all of my heart, with all of my soul, with all of my mind, and with all of my strength"? Can we echo the disciples' declaration, "*See, we have left everything and followed you*" (Mark 10:28)? Our lives are secure and our future is assured because of God's power and grace. As I say these things, I am praying that you can truly grasp His delight in you and His love for you and His call upon your life. Your love relationship with God Most High should be everything. It should be, in every way, by far the most important, passionate, tender, intimate, and secure relationship you have. So pursue it with all you've got, to wherever it takes you, beyond what you've ever known! And don't stop short of being able to say from the depths of your being, "*Your lovingkindness is better than life*" (Ps. 63:3 NASB); don't settle for anything less. I am praying for you the same prayer Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to*



*be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21)*

As you close today, pray and ask God to reveal His love to you and pour the fullness of His love into your heart. Using the list below as a guide, ask Him to help you lay all the things before Him that hinder you from truly and deeply experiencing His love. Ask Him to help you empty yourself so you can have more of Him. Identify all of your thoughts, feelings, and concerns and give them over to Him. Humble yourself before Him and be willing to diligently seek after Him.

Lay down your fears.

Lay down your inadequacies.

Lay down your dreams.

Lay down your pain and your hurts.

Lay down your broken heart.

Lay down your disappointments.

Lay down your idealism.

Lay down your endless list of things you have to do, should be doing, or should have done.

Lay down your failures.

After you have prayed and given these things to the Lord, truly leave them there. Entrust them to God. He is big enough and strong enough and wise enough to handle it all. He loves you—He is your Abba Father, your daddy. Trust Him. Let go and give Him your whole heart. Allow Him to be your beloved.



# L o v e d   b y   S a c r i f i c e

## D A Y   T W O

The greatest love of all has been demonstrated in the greatest sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The cross reveals the fullness of God's love to us. God made a way for our dark souls to be washed clean by the blood of His Son! What amazing grace, great mercy, and extravagant love! This is God's beautiful lovingkindness that is true and sure every moment.

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:6-11).*

What condition were we in when Christ died for us, according to this passage?

What were we saved from?

What did Christ accomplish for us?



We can rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ because of all we have received through Him! Let's take a look at the list of things God has done for believers in Christ, according to Romans 5:6-11. The words and phrases Paul uses in this passage to describe what Christ did for us are profound and may not be familiar or easy to grasp. So let's walk through them together.

**Justified by His blood:** To be proclaimed righteous by God, as if we had never sinned and would never sin again. We are still sinners, but Christ has taken the penalty for our sin upon himself. Our debt has been transferred to His account. We have no remaining debt of sin.

**Saved by Him from the wrath of God:** We must first understand that the penalty for sin is death and eternal, never-ending punishment. God, in His mercy and grace, provided a way for us to be saved from this destruction. The wrath of God that we deserved was poured out upon Jesus, His Son, so that we could receive eternal life.

**Reconciled to God by the death of His Son:** The grave offenses caused by our rebellion against God broke our relationship with Him. Christ made peace between us and God by taking our offenses against God and placing them upon himself. Our relationship was made right with God through Jesus' death.

**Saved by His life:** We are saved literally by His life, through the risen Christ who dwells within us. He brings us to life spiritually now and will one day physically resurrect us. We are also being saved from sin day by day, moment by moment, by the Spirit of Christ who dwells within us and gives us power to live for Him. We would never be able to live the Christian life apart from the Holy Spirit.



Pray and ask God to give you eyes to see the love that accomplished your right standing with Him. Read Titus 3:3-7 and answer the following questions.

When did He save us?

Did He save us because we merited it?

How did He save us?

How is Christ described?

What condition were we in? What did God do for us? Make a list below.

Us Before Christ

Us In Christ



Close with prayer, thanking God for Jesus' sacrifice.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# L o v e d   b y   G r a c e

## D A Y   T H R E E

God's lovingkindness is demonstrated powerfully in His amazing grace that gave us a gift we didn't deserve, the gift of being brought from death to eternal life with Christ!

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:4-9)*

What does this passage say God did for us? Why?

Where has He seated us? How does that compare to how we see ourselves?

Read Romans 5:1-2 and 12-21. What do these passages say God did for us?



Humbly read the age-old hymn below. The words were written by Charlotte Elliott in 1835. Ira Sankey wrote that Charlotte was visiting friends in London, where she met pastor Dr. Caesar Malan. "While seated at supper, the minister said he hoped that she was a Christian. She took offense at this, and replied that she would rather not discuss that question. Dr. Malan said that he was sorry if he had offended her, that he always liked to speak a word for his Master, and that he hoped that the young lady would some day become a worker for Christ. . . . three weeks later, Miss Elliott told the minister that ever since he had spoken to her she had been trying to find her Savior, and that she now wished him to tell her how to come to Christ. 'Just come to Him as you are,' Dr. Malan said. This she did . . . Shortly thereafter she wrote this hymn"<sup>1</sup>:

Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown, hath broken every barrier down;  
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love, the breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,  
Here for a season, then above, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!



Elliott's hymn responds to the grace of God's invitation to come to Him through the lamb, His Son, Jesus Christ. Today and tomorrow we are going to read two chapters of Leviticus (or more if you would like to go deeper) to help us better understand God's lovingkindness in the sacrifice of His Son. Many people find Leviticus to be a difficult, even boring book, but it is one of my favorite books of the Bible because it helped me see the gospel more fully. I was able to see and understand the seriousness of sin, Christ's death on the cross, and the price He paid on my behalf. Through these Old Testament sacrifices, God was preparing His people to understand the sacrifice His Son would make on the cross for our sin. It is an absolutely amazing, holy, indescribable picture. God is the ultimate teacher. He knows how to help us understand our sin, His love, and what He has done for us because of this love. He uses earthly pictures to help us comprehend heavenly things. Although these Old Testament sacrifices are not a part of our cultural experience today, the Holy Spirit can still use them to grant us a greater understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God that took away our sins. In Leviticus, God gives instructions to Israel for how to offer sacrifices for their sin. When we think of this through the eyes of God, who was preparing His people to understand the sacrifice His Son was to make on the cross for our sin, it is an absolutely amazing, holy, ineffable picture. God explains the meaning of the blood in Leviticus 17:11, which may help as you read. *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."*

Read Leviticus 1 (read Leviticus 2-3 if you would like to go deeper). Before you begin, pray for wisdom and understanding. On the next page, record any notes or questions about the sacrifices. Write just enough description regarding the distinctives, purpose, or symbolism of the sacrifices so that you can meditate on what Christ has done for you and be able to recall what you have read. You do not need to understand all of it, and much of it may not make sense to you. Although you may feel overwhelmed with the details, just humbly walk through this, asking God to meet you right where you are and to apply His Word to your heart. The Lord will help bring the pieces together in His time.



What can wash away our sin? The blood of Jesus. It is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Thanks be to God for making a way where there seemed to be no way. Close in quiet worship with the words of this hymn by Robert Lowry (1876), “Nothing But the Blood.” Thank the Lord God for the gift of His Son and the shedding of His blood on your behalf.

What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can my sin erase  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!  
Naught of works, 'tis all of grace—  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

Oh! precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow;  
No other fount I know,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This is all my hope and peace—  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!  
This is all my righteousness—  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# C o m p r e h e n d   H i s   L o v e

## D A Y   F O U R

Take a moment to really contemplate God's love. Ask the Lord to help you fully take it in and receive the truth that God loves you. We want to comprehend God's love and be able to share it. Paul, out of his love for God and his love for God's children, prays for the Ephesians to grasp God's love.

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21)*

What does Paul ask of God for the Ephesians?

Fill in the blanks below with your own personal pronouns and pray this prayer, asking the Lord to help you grow in faith to believe and comprehend His great love for you.

*For this reason I bow my knees before you Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of your glory you may grant \_\_\_\_ (me) \_\_\_\_ strength with power through your Spirit in \_\_\_\_\_ inner being, so that Christ may dwell in \_\_\_\_\_ heart through faith—that \_\_\_\_\_, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that \_\_\_\_\_ may be filled with all your fullness. Now to you who is able to do far more abundantly than all that \_\_\_\_\_ ask or think, according to your power at work within \_\_\_\_\_, to you be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*



For the remainder of this week we will continue to examine the sacrifice of Jesus in various sections of Scripture. Today we are resuming our study in Leviticus, which gives us an Old Testament foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ. Continue to meditate on God's lovingkindness and the lengths He went to in order to save you. Ask Him to help you better understand the incredible grace that He provided once and for all in the perfect Lamb of God.

Read Leviticus 4 (read Leviticus 5-6:21 if you would like to go deeper). Again note just enough description from this chapter regarding the distinctives, purpose, or symbolism of the sacrifices to be able to recall what you have read. You do not need to understand it all; just walk through this the best you can, asking God to meet you right where you are and to apply His Word to your heart.

Leviticus 4



What kind of love is this? Continue to ask the Lord to help you more fully comprehend His great love for you. Read Hebrews 9 and write your thanksgiving and praise for how Christ's sacrifice is so much greater than the Old Testament sacrifices described in Leviticus!



My prayer is that God would give you the grace to see the fathomless extent of His love . . . the incredible breadth, length, height, and depth that our heavenly Father has gone to, not only to purchase us, but also to demonstrate His love in terms that we can understand. His love truly surpasses our knowledge and comprehension. Can you identify one thing you read in Leviticus that gave you a deeper appreciation for what Christ did for you on the cross?

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# P r o c l a i m   H i s   L o v e

## D A Y   F I V E

Psalm 63:3 says that God's love results in David's praise. David praises God because of His love. Read Psalm 40:1-10 (or through the end if you have time).

What does David say that God has done for him?

What has God done for you?

Can you proclaim praise from your heart like David? If not, what is holding you back? Are you waiting upon God to do a great work in your heart like David was waiting for Him to do?



The sacrificial system prescribed in the law provided only a shadow—merely a dim picture—of the amazing things that were going to come. In this passage from Hebrews, we are given a beautiful explanation of this.

*For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Heb. 10:1-4)*



Read Hebrews 10:1-25. Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection proclaim God's love. We want to proclaim His love with our lips and our lives. From the following verses, write what you observe about the relationship of the Old Testament sacrifices to Jesus' death on the cross. Don't be afraid of writing something wrong; freely write your ideas or observations. Become familiar with the text so you can be ready when we cover it during the lecture. It will be a life-changing blessing for you!

Verse 1 (What do you learn about the law?)

Verse 4

Verses 5-7 (Compare to Psalm 40:6-8.)

Verses 12-14 (What did Christ accomplish?)

Verses 17-25 (What comfort and encouragement and confidence do we have?)



God is the ultimate teacher. He knows how to help us understand spiritual things by giving us earthly, tangible examples. In the Old Testament, He explained to the people the concept of redemption by the incredible picture of animal sacrifices. In the New Testament, the people could see and touch Jesus himself (1 John 1:1-2). God helps us comprehend our sin and His love in ways that we can understand. He wants us to be able to “see” and “feel” and “touch” what He has done on our behalf. Although we can no longer physically touch Him as the people did in the New Testament through Jesus, we can still see and touch Him through their living testimony to Him. Read the following Scriptures that so powerfully illustrate the love of Christ for us and note your observations.

Isaiah 53

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Galatians 2:19-20



May we see, believe, and receive God's great love so that we might proclaim His love with our lips and with our lives! Ask the Lord to help you enter in and dwell in His love so that you can truly live it. Close today in prayer, praising and thanking God and your Lord Jesus Christ for the love given to you in the cross. *"Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands"* (Ps. 63:3-4 NASB). Join with David and praise God for His lovingkindness as we end with this prayer from the *Valley of Vision*.

O MY SAVIOUR,

I thank thee from the depths of my being for thy wondrous grace and love  
in bearing my sin in thine own body on the tree.

May thy cross be to me as the tree that sweetens my bitter Marahs,  
as the rod that blossoms with life and beauty,  
as the brazen serpent that calls forth the look of faith.

By thy cross crucify my every sin;

Use it to increase my intimacy with thyself;

Make it the ground of all my comfort, the liveliness of all my duties,

the sum of all thy gospel promises, the comfort of all my afflictions,

the vigour of my love, thankfulness, graces, the very essence of my religion;

And by it give me that rest without rest, the rest of ceaseless praise.<sup>2</sup>

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

## **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

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

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# My Soul Is Satisfied

*My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night. (Ps. 63:5-6)*

**C**hristian, you are the object of perfect love and great affection. Your heavenly Father went to unfathomable lengths to rescue, redeem, and restore you. You were brought up from the depths, from death to life, from darkness to light, from damnation to salvation. The moment you were brought into this relationship with the Lord Jesus you were given a new heart and a new mind. Your old heart of stone that could never enjoy the things of the Lord was transformed into a heart of flesh created to worship God and enjoy Him. He has designed you to be able to drink in deeply and receive, enjoy, and proclaim this amazing love. You have been created for God Most High to worship Him, to delight in Him, and to walk in sweet fellowship with Him always in *everything*, through *everything*, and above *everything*. He has formed and shaped you to call to be in a deep, abiding, and joyful love relationship with our beloved, our Lord, our Savior, and our King, for God's glory and for our enjoyment. Why is it then that we struggle so desperately in this? Why can't we enjoy Him always? Might it be that we live in the midst of a sinful world, with sinners and saints who still sin, and with our own remaining sin in us? Yes. We are not in heaven yet. Nor is it time. God has His plan, His perspective, and His purposes for us that are higher, greater, broader, deeper, and longer than our human plans, perspectives, and purposes.

David boldly proclaims that His Lord's love is better than life itself; he declares that he has no greater joy or deeper satisfaction than to taste of the Lord's goodness and to feast upon Him. He has learned something we all long to learn and desire to experience more and more. If we don't feel this need or desire yet, we must cry out to God to grant us the desire, because that is the reason we have been created and redeemed. David has come to know God intimately and sense His loveliness, His holiness, and His perfections in a way that is far different than mere intellectual knowledge. It is very



real—so real—and is something sensational, something sweet and savory, something so intensely and perfectly satisfying that nothing on earth could possibly compare. It is a knowledge, not only knowledge about something, but also a knowledge that comes from actually having tasted and experienced it. David knows and delights in God in an experiential, tangible, and visceral way. He exclaims in Psalm 34:8, “*O taste and see that the Lord is good.*” He receives God and His love and digests His truths by faith in the depths of his soul. Learning to do this is his sole desire and the praise of his soul. He testifies of his growing dependence of feasting upon Him and the profound satisfaction he is coming to enjoy. The Lord fills him and satiates his desires more than the finest foods and delicacies. “*My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips*” (Ps. 63:5). He is saying, “It is only you, Lord, only you. I desire only you, and no one else and nothing else compares to you. You are my all in all, my everything. My soul and my flesh long for you alone; my hunger is satisfied and my thirst is quenched in you alone.”

What if, as you read this, you are thinking to yourself, “I don’t feel this way. I have never experienced this. And I don’t know if I ever will.” Do not despair. Keep reading. Maybe you don’t even “feel” like this is of great importance to you. Don’t give up. Proceed by faith, not by your feelings. This doesn’t come naturally to our sin-encrusted souls or sin-infested natures. David had to discipline himself and work out his salvation with fear and trembling. He had to set his heart and mind to seek after God, by grace through faith, over time and through intense trial. As a result, how has God honored David’s pursuit, and what has God done in David’s heart? How can we know such joy? By grace through faith. How can we cry out to God to do for us what He has done for David? By grace through faith, and believing the promises of God. Placing *all* of our hope in Him and not in ourselves and in our strength. Are we willing to allow God to do what it takes to work in and on our hearts that we might do as David has? Why is it that when we say we love the Lord and He is our God, we don’t put Him first? Why don’t we set aside time to be with Him in His Word? We allow our affections to wander, and our desires drift towards the temporal. Is sleep more important than sanctification? Is entertainment more edifying than the eternal? Are passions more satisfying than Christ? O Lord, forgive us. O Lord, save us from ourselves!

It is an ever-present sin struggle that we will experience until we reach heaven. Even when we desire this joy, this fellowship, and this communion, sometimes the world and its pressures, our worries and our cares, our passions and our longings can almost seem to put an invisible, super-strong cellophane wrap around our hearts that is clear but seemingly impenetrable. The words of God



are right in front of our eyes. They enter our minds and we comprehend them at a certain level. We try to apply them to our hearts, waiting with anticipation for them to pierce the outer layer, only to discover there is yet another layer and then another. We may even feel the Spirit's touch, but our hearts can stubbornly resist change. We know God is all-powerful and His Word is effective, but we often feel beyond its reach. We need God's grace! We are so utterly dependent upon Him. However, we need to do what He has called us to do, trusting in Him to accomplish the work in our hearts and persevering by faith. Instead though, other things detour us time and time again. When life is not unfolding as we had thought, our faith weakens, the sinful flesh resists, and we fall prey to temptation, fear, worry, bitterness, unbelief.

God's ways are not our ways, and they are often much more difficult than we think a loving God would allow. Perhaps you have been praying for years for your husband to pursue a relationship with the Lord instead of with work or sports. Maybe you have a daughter who you thought loved the Lord but is now telling you that she is moving in with her boyfriend. In these kinds of situations, we can fall into wrong thought patterns and turn to the temporal things the Lord has given us to enjoy, such as food, drink, sleep, or friendships. In effect we misuse and rely on them rather than the Lord. We grasp for and cling to an immediate temporal solution and inadvertently the temporal comes between us and the eternal.

Let us ask the Lord to give us the same conviction as Joshua, "*Choose this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Josh. 24:15). The Bible tells us that Joshua followed the Lord fully. Will we follow the Lord with abandon and lay down everything? Fully? Are we willing to pursue God and His righteousness with our all so that we will find satisfaction in Him and believe Him greater than life itself? Will we set our eyes upon the Lord and seek after Him with all of our heart in order to develop the good soil there, that we too might know the deep and penetrating satisfaction of the Lord in the depths of our soul? The goal is that God, and only God, would be our greatest satisfaction and our greatest delight—more so than the finest symphony or your favorite food. Will we resolve to be like David? Will we follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus who made time to be with His heavenly Father, going up to the mountain to pray even through the nights?

How can we seek after this? What can we do to pursue this kind of relationship? God is the one who transforms our hearts! But we do have a part. We must seek after Him earnestly. We must hunger and thirst after Him. Above *all* else. At the expense of *all* things. We must seek to find *all* of our satisfaction, *all* of our delight, and *all* of our joy, hope, peace, and strength in the Lord of Lords.



It is so true that the beginning of a thing is the end of a thing. The foundation of a building is everything. David is saying that his soul is satisfied in His Lord and in his communion with Him. This is the distinction.

In my own life, in my previous pursuit, God was *one of* the things I delighted in. He was a part of my life. I was giving Him *almost* all of myself—*most* of my day, *most* of my life. But I was holding onto something. I was afraid to let go. What would happen? Would everything fall apart? Would I lose the things that were so near and dear to my heart? But the question for all of us is, what are those things that we can't entrust to the Lord or feel like we can't, or better yet, don't *want* to entrust to the Lord because we might lose them. And then lose everything. We must be honest if we can. It is hard to turn and look at what is hidden in our hearts. It is painful, even excruciating, to see that we aren't who we think we are, that we cherish things in our hearts above Christ, and that we don't want to lose those things—particularly when they are good things. A larger question arises in the mix as we think about these things. Who is Lord and who knows what is good, better, and best for us? We say that we trust God and trust His heart. We say that He is Lord. But is He? Let's think back to the first week of our study. David says, "*O God, you are my God.*" Is God our God or not? This is the question. A simple, but important question that we all must answer and then act upon. I almost let go of all control, but I was keeping a little part for myself. Just a little.

The day-to-day demands of life can pull us away, and the battle with our flesh can wear us out. Daily we must run to the Lord to refresh and restore us. But we can lose our focus, our perspective, and our passionate pursuit. Periodically, we may need to completely reorient and recalibrate. Some of the ways I do this are, in a more significant way a couple of times each year, to set aside several days to fast and pray, or simply to take extra time alone with the Lord on my back porch, in the local coffee shop, or a local park. I have to step away from the daily to dedicate myself in a new and fresh way to the divine. Every time it looks different. Sometimes this special time with the Lord looks like getting up earlier each morning so that I have more time with Him; other times the Lord has provided time alone with Him far away from everything.

Several summers ago the Lord provided a fresh sense of His presence in a special time with Him. I traveled to Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park on Mt. Desert Island in northern Maine. Early the first morning of my visit, I was on the hunt for a good cup of coffee, an extra hot latte to be exact, and some helpful tourist advice from a local. There was so much to see that I didn't know where to begin. It took me a while, but I finally found a coffee shop down at the harbor, and the owner was a native. When I asked him what I should investigate, his eyes opened wide and a smile filled his face.



With unusual enthusiasm and conviction, he told me the first place I needed to go (and to make sure I didn't miss) was the top of Cadillac Mountain. This was a surprise. Peaking at a mere 1,530 feet, it was hard to imagine that it would be much of a highlight. The latte wasn't too terrific, but his recommendation was well worth the search and the \$3.50 I paid for the coffee. Summiting Cadillac turned out to be one of the most awe-inspiring and worshipful moments of my life. I have climbed much higher peaks in the Rockies, but this view arrested my soul and compelled my heart to worship God with such intensity that I could barely take it all in. The wideness and beauty of the view so vast, the glory of the sky and sea so tremendous, and the varying hues of blue so rich, made me feel as though I had been transported to another realm. There was a sense that I had been lifted up to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord reflected in creation as if I was on that mountain with God Most High (and actually, I was). The sense was so strong that my heart ached, and my breath was taken away. I could only sit motionless and stare in awe at this vista of creation. After a while I opened my Bible and began to praise God. I don't know how long I was there. Hours passed. I didn't want to leave. I had been ushered to another place. I felt selfish and undeserving. I longed for my husband to be there so I could share it with him. Later I learned that during certain times of the year, it is the first place in the U.S. to see the sunrise. It seemed apropos that this splendid place was often to be the first to be touched by the light of day. It made me think of the light of God's love. God's glory revealed in His creation drew me closer to himself. I had a taste of His holiness, His might, and His majesty that I had rarely sensed before. I didn't want to leave, but I had work to do. I had to descend the mountain to write.

This experience reminded me of David's words: *"And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD"* (Ps. 27:6). My head, my heart, and my soul had been lifted up above the things of the world, away from the cares and concerns. My weaknesses and my sins all seemed to vanish in the beauty of His glory reflected in His creation. What I wanted was to humbly bow before my Lord, my God, my King, and my Redeemer in praise and worship, thanking Him for bringing me closer to Him thousands of miles away from my home in Louisville.

God had used the beauty and majesty of His creation to draw me closer to himself, to help me taste Him. It touched me deeply. The tender moving of His Spirit, His mercy, and grace reached those places worn thin by my sin or by life's trials, stirring within me a deepening awareness of His glory and my need for God . . . to be closer to Him and to be deeper in earnest pursuit of Him and His righteousness. I now have a grateful yearning for God. I want to enjoy Him, to feast on Him every



moment of every day, to enjoy the great goodness that He has given, and to please Him above all things, but I fall so far short. My finitude, faultiness, and frailty have often made me want to give up instead of feasting upon Him. I feel unworthy, unlovely, and unloved. My flesh gets in the way, as our flesh does for all of us. So we must continually cry out to Him, draw near to Him, and come to Him anew. We must seek after Him earnestly in a passionate desire to be satisfied fully in Him. We want to be able to proclaim just as David did, *“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips”* (Ps. 63:5). We don’t need the beauty of Cadillac Mountain to transform our hearts. The presence of the Lord is more than enough.

Listen. The Lord calls to us to come! *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost”* (Isa. 55:1). So let us come! *“He will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory”* (Phil. 4:19). Come and enjoy life with Him. Come, enjoy Him! He wants us to fully receive by faith His grace, His joy, His love, and His peace. He has supplied the amount of grace we need and then some. We can receive it freely! Then, we can be generous with all we have received. We can be a reflection of what Jesus has done for us. Taste that the Lord is good, and feast upon the glory of God. Then, let us be a people that are compelled to invite people to feast!

The Lord longs for us to come to Him, to desire Him above all, to allow Him to reveal to us more of who He is that we might delight and find satisfaction in Him. Jonathan Edwards beautifully describes such an encounter. At age 17, he was reading: *“Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Tim. 1:17 KJV). Dr. Peter Hammond wrote about Edwards’ experience:

There came into my soul . . . a sense of the glory of the Divine Being, a new sense, quite different from anything I’d experienced before . . . from about that time I began to have a new kind of apprehension and ideas of Christ, and the work of Redemption and the glorious way of Salvation by Him.” The doctrines of God’s sovereignty, which had previously appeared “repugnant” to him suddenly became “exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet” to his soul. He rejoiced in God’s sovereignty, glory and majesty. From this point Edwards noted that he continually saw in nature: “God’s excellency, His wisdom, His purity and love . . . in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds and blue skies; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature” and this greatly fixed his mind. The next time he experienced a thunderstorm he was captivated to see the



spectacular lightning and “hear the majestic and awful voice of God’s thunder . . . my great and glorious God . . . it always seemed natural for me to sing.”<sup>1</sup>

Oh, that the Lord would transform every moment and every day we spend with Him that we might see Him, delight in Him, and enjoy Him. May we be fully satisfied in Him, and in that deep and abiding satisfaction may we glorify Him and draw others to our great, mighty, beautiful God! “*Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, forever and ever. Amen*” (1 Tim. 1:17 KJV). Are you seeking to give yourself to Jesus every hour of every day? My prayer is that you will stop right now, lay down your notebook, put your pride and fears aside, get down on your knees and bow your face to the ground, and ask the Lord to search your heart. Is there any area you are holding back from Him? Tell the Lord that you want to desire Him more than anything in this world, that you want to love Him with everything that you have, and that you want to leave all things behind so that you can know Him more than you ever imagined possible—so that you can shout from the highest mountain top and from the deepest valley, “*My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips* (Ps. 63:5). You, Lord God, are my everything! You are my everything in everything, through everything, and above everything!”



# T r u s t   H i m

## D A Y   T W O

David says his soul is satisfied in God. We want to learn from him and be fully satisfied in God as well. When we fix our eyes on Christ and on Him alone, we find a depth of satisfaction and delight known no other way. We glorify Him, and He is glorified through us. David beautifully summarizes how we are to trust the Lord:

*Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. 7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! (Ps. 37:3-7)*

Make a list of the instructions given and the promises made in this psalm.

Taking the Lord at His Word, copy these verses onto index cards, put them in places you see regularly, and practice these instructions this week. Meditate and pray through the words. Make a note of what the Lord teaches you as you meditate on these verses this week so that you can share about them in your small group.



When we look to the Lord, put all of our trust in Him, and commit our ways to Him, we make Him our refuge. He becomes our bulwark, our shield, and our defense. Psalm 37 closes with these two verses: *“The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him”* (Ps. 37:39-40).

Now read all of Psalm 37 and write what you learn about trusting the Lord.



As we read in Lesson One, David paints a picture of the Lord as our Shepherd in Psalm 23. Read this psalm again and list the ways in which you can trust the Lord when you are under His care.

*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.*  
(Ps. 23)



How can the knowledge gleaned from Psalms 37 and 23 be applied to your life as a wife, a mother, a friend, a professional, etc.? Be specific and give a current illustration from your life.



God has His plan for our lives. What do you learn from the following verses about “the paths of the Lord” and about those who choose to trust God and walk in His paths?

Psalm 25:8-14

Proverbs 3:5-8



God’s Word tells us that when we truly trust the Lord, revere Him, and do not rely on our human perspective, our bones will be refreshed. Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* puts it this way, “*Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life!*” (Prov. 3:8). Is there anything in your life you need to entrust to the Lord? Do you need to acknowledge that He is the one in control? Write your answers and then take them to the Lord in prayer as you close out your study today.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Rest in His Love and Sovereignty

## DAY THREE

Knowing and understanding God's intimate knowledge of you and His sovereignty in your life will bring profound peace and satisfaction deep within your soul. These are important doctrinal truths, and we could spend much more time on them, but the goal today is simply to give a 10,000 foot view. So, let's begin by listening to David recount the Lord's sovereignty in His life, even from birth.

*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Ps. 139:13-16)*

Each and every part of you, inside and out, is known intimately by the Lord. He has known every day, every hour, and every moment of your life; not one thing has escaped His notice. He made you just as you are. Are there things you don't like about yourself? He has allowed all that has happened in your life. Are there things that have happened during your life that you find difficult to accept, let alone be thankful for? Hold these thoughts up to the Word today and be specific. Even when we know that God is sovereign, we need to be honest about our struggles with Him. Tell Him how you feel and ask Him to change your heart.



Read all of Psalm 139. What does the Lord know about you? When did the Lord become intimately involved in your life?



It is amazing that the more we understand how much He knows us and loves us, the more we want to trust Him, spend time with Him, and be in His Word. The more we feast upon Him, the more we are filled with joy, peace, thanksgiving, and kindness. His love flows right through us and out from us. Our faith opens up the floodgates of His love to pour into all the lives around us. Conversely, our anxiety, our doubt, and our unbelief constrict the outflow of the presence of the Spirit in our lives. If we don't get it, we certainly can't pass it on.



Psalm 100 is a psalm of praise that reminds us beautifully and powerfully that the Lord is the one who made us. Read it and circle some key phrases. Then take a moment to pray and praise Him that you are His.

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! 3 Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Ps. 100)*



No one has rule or reign in our lives over the Lord. The days that were ordained for us cannot be altered by any other power. God is sovereign; He rules and reigns. In Daniel 4 King Nebuchadnezzar, a man appointed by God to rule, denied God's power and authority in his life and took credit for all that he had. After sending a messenger to give the king an opportunity to repent, God judged his arrogance and pride. When he didn't repent, King Nebuchadnezzar was cast down for seven long years. Finally, he came to his senses and repented. Read Daniel 4:30-37.

*And the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" 31 While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, 32 and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." 33 Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. 34 At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; 35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" 36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Dan. 4:30-37)*



With Nebuchadnezzar in mind, we are going to spend some time looking at Job. But before we read, I want to take a moment to set the stage and establish a framework through which we can think about and understand what is happening in these chapters.

In chapter 1 of Job, we read that God suggests to Satan to consider His servant Job. The days ordained for Job, difficult, painful, and trying as they were, had been permitted by God. God permitted Satan to act in Job's life, but He didn't author the evil against Job (Job 1:6, 12). God's sovereignty in this manner can be difficult to understand, so let's briefly look at the differences in how it is manifested to give us a better understanding.

- God *passively* ordains evil in the world because of the fall.  
(He permits but doesn't author).
- God *actively* ordains hardships we endure
  1. because of our actions;
    - a) some in obedience b) some in disobedience or sin
  2. because of the actions of others;
  3. because of sin in a fallen world (i.e. a father dying young of heart disease).

Now read the following passages and write a brief summary of what you learn in regard to our position and God's sovereignty.

Job 1

Job 38-42:6



I don't want you to miss what we have examined in this lesson, two very important principles that must never be separated. Both of these ideas are found in Psalm 139, which we read at the beginning of the lesson. First, God is intimately acquainted with us in every way. "*For you formed my inward parts*" (v. 13). And second, God is absolutely sovereign over everything that happens to us. "*In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them*" (v. 16). If we focus on God's intimate acquaintance with us, but forget or

ignore the concept of His sovereignty, we end up with a God who cares deeply about us, but is not able to ultimately control destiny for our good. Many of us may lean this way when trouble, hardship, or illness strikes. On the other hand, if we emphasize God's sovereignty without remembering that He loves us, our times of trial and suffering will be quite terrifying.

So, how do we respond when we experience pain, affliction, or loss? Do we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord? We must be careful not to blame God. Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* tells a story that gives a concrete example of how God's sovereignty works in our lives.

I knew a man in my first parish who had lost most of his eyesight after he was shot in the face during a drug deal gone bad. He told me that he had been an extremely selfish and cruel person, but he had always blamed his constant legal and relational problems on others. The loss of his sight had devastated him, but it had also profoundly humbled him. "As my physical eyes were closed, my spiritual eyes were opened, as it were. I finally saw how I'd been treating people. I changed, and now for the first time in my life I have friends, real friends. It was a terrible price to pay, and yet I must say it was worth it. I finally have what makes life worthwhile."<sup>2</sup>



Even in the most dire circumstances, when things almost seem surreal, we can trust God's love for us and His sovereignty. Through His mighty hands of love, we can know that He has allowed or ordained the place we stand and that it is for our good and His glory. Close your time today by reading, reflecting upon, and praying through Romans 8:31-39.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# C o n t e n t   i n   H i s   P u r p o s e s

## D A Y   F O U R

We may think we know what is best for us, and we may long after many things, but true satisfaction comes when we believe God, trust Him fully, respond to His call upon our lives, and walk according to His purposes and not our own. Often there are circumstances in our lives that are so difficult or painful or perplexing that we can hardly comprehend how they are good or how any good can come from them. In some sense we understand that good can come from pain, but that doesn't make pain good. In fact, some circumstances may seem just plain bad. But when we embrace the circumstances in our lives, by God's grace, as the work of His hands—and as God's highest and best for us—then the greatest transformation takes place and effects radical life change. When we fully trust in Him and His sovereignty over all our life circumstances, we are able to be fully content in His purposes. We can then abide and rest in Him and enjoy His presence, whatever the situation may be. The joy of the Lord truly becomes our strength, and He is powerfully and dramatically glorified.

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Rom. 8:26-30)*

Most women struggle at times to sense that God has made them for a purpose, and they do not know what that purpose is or how He will use them. I know I have. However, the more I read God's Word and choose to believe it, the more I realize that God formed me and my circumstances for a purpose. Where do you struggle with your weaknesses? What circumstances in your life are difficult to accept or understand?



Read 1 Peter 1:1-9. Listen as Peter encourages us to be content in God's purposes and to trust in the hope we have in God. We were created, chosen, and redeemed for such a time as this. As we rejoice in the midst of our suffering, our faith is proven and proclaimed. In the ESV translation of this passage, fill in the blanks below with your name and the appropriate pronouns. This is exactly what the Holy Spirit does for us as believers. He applies the promises of the Bible to our hearts. He whispers, "This promise of my Word is for you."

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_\_, am a disciple of Jesus Christ . . . who was chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that \_\_\_\_\_ may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be [mine] in fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused \_\_\_\_\_ to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for \_\_\_\_\_, who am protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this \_\_\_\_\_ greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, \_\_\_\_\_ have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of \_\_\_\_\_ faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though \_\_\_\_\_ have not seen Him, \_\_\_\_\_ love Him, and though \_\_\_\_\_ do not see Him now, \_\_\_\_\_ believe in Him, and \_\_\_\_\_ greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of \_\_\_\_\_ faith the salvation of \_\_\_\_\_ soul.



The things God has allowed in your life and mine were to prepare us and enable us to accomplish that which He had planned from long ago. We are vessels of His glory. We were made to magnify Him and enjoy Him and be completely satisfied in Him! Use the Ephesians passage to offer a prayer to the Lord. Give your life to Him. Believe and trust Him to fulfill all of His Word in your life. Identify the times when you struggle most to rest in the Lord and His plan, perspective, and purposes. List those below. Pray and ask Him to help you be willing to go the distance and live your life for His purpose.

## TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Filled by Following

## DAY FIVE

God has created us to find our greatest satisfaction in Him and in doing His will.

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)*

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)*

What does it mean to you that God says you are His workmanship?

Think about how that relates to the passage from Titus. Why did Jesus give himself for us? Think for a moment and allow God to give you a glimpse of how He has been forming and shaping you since you were born to create a unique vessel to accomplish His wonderful purposes. Write your thoughts.



Pray and ask the Lord to open your eyes and your heart to the truths you will be reading today. Look up the following verses and record the key phrase that you see. The sequence of these Scriptures paints such a beautiful picture of the example Christ gave us to carry out the will of the Father.

Record what Jesus says about himself:

John 4:34

John 5:19-20

John 5:30

John 6:38

John 14:10-11

Record what these verses say about our call to follow Jesus:

1 Peter 2:20-25

1 Peter 3:8-12



Jesus' food was doing the will of His father. Quiet yourself before the Lord today as your study for this week comes to a close. God is the maker of our hearts. Remember, as we delight in Him, He will transform us, causing our hearts to delight to do His will and to carry out His purpose in our lives. As we follow Jesus to fulfill the purpose God prepared for us, our souls will be truly satisfied. We are called to follow his example. First Peter 2:21 tells us, *"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."* Of course there is a limit to how much we can imitate Jesus. For instance, in some places in the Gospel of John, when Jesus is talking about doing the will of the Father, He is talking about giving eternal life! We certainly cannot imitate Jesus in that way, but nevertheless the Lord has work for each of us to do, work too marvelous for us to imagine.



Write a prayer to the Lord asking Him to accomplish His good pleasure in you. Remember that He is the maker of your heart. You might ask Him to grant you His wisdom and power to follow Christ's example, so that you fulfill the high and holy purpose God prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

## DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

### **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# In the Shadow of Your Wings

*For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. (Ps. 63:7)*

Sometimes it is all we can do to keep from being swallowed up in our thoughts. Our circumstances can seem beyond what we can bear, with trouble on every side and problems that seem insurmountable. The night may bring an unwelcome visitor—sleeplessness—or the morning dawns with a heavy fog of depression. You may be standing over your kitchen sink with no one in the room, but you feel like you are fighting against a legion for your life. We may almost feel as though we are losing it. Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the “*the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*” (Eph. 6:12). There are times when we will need to cry out to God for shelter to get through a difficult situation, and then there will be times when all we can do is hide under the cover of His almighty wings. The Psalms repeatedly sing this anthem: “*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings*” (Ps. 17:8); “*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings*” (Ps. 36:7); “*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by*” (Ps. 57:1); “*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty*” (Ps. 91:1). He is our place of refuge and safety. We want to learn how to fully rely on Him.

I received the following email from a friend, which I feel compelled to share with you. She was in the midst of a three-pronged attack from the enemy, her flesh, and the world. She knew God’s love for her, knew His Word, treasured Him above the things of this world, yet her circumstances left her hanging by a thread.

Let me tell you where I’ve been this year. We have been hit broadside by one trial after another. Most recently we have experienced a devastating betrayal. For five months I cried non-stop. During the following two months there were no tears left. There was nothing left;



I was dead. I wasn't eating or sleeping. The despair and hopelessness was beyond anything I had ever experienced. It felt as though the Lord brought me to the edge of a cliff and left me there. It was the most frightening time of my life. Not too long ago, two dear Christian friends turned to me and asked me how I was doing. I looked them straight in the eye and told them I wasn't going to make it. I didn't even know what I meant by that, but I meant every word of it. I was in so much pain. I just didn't know how I could live like this day after day without relief. Then, of course, came my faith struggle—I was so disappointed in myself. How could I end up in this state as a “good” Christian? I felt that I should have been able to stand up under this trial much better than I was. Many people were extremely worried about me. I was losing several pounds a week. I was eating only when I forced myself and everything tasted like cardboard. Sleep was non-existent. Nothing gave me relief from my thoughts. There was no joy or pleasure, and fear was ruling my mind. I put memory verses everywhere in my house, and I would just wander aimlessly from one verse to the next just trying to hold on for one more minute. Then the deep depression set in and the anxiety mounted. My life was more than I could bear. I felt none of God's grace or mercy.

Whether we realize it or not, we are in a constant battle. We must be on the alert as we encounter daily challenges, trials, and temptations. Our journey of faith will not be without attacks, threats, and ambushes from the enemy of our soul. The attacks can range from what *appear* to be imaginary mind games to an all-out assault on your family or your business. Evil people, evil spirits, evil habits, and evil thoughts are often lurking. The enemies of the soul are all around and within. Satan. The world. Our flesh. And our warfare will often be with more than one of these foes at a time.

Satan, our enemy, is deceptive. He is not planning on arriving with fanfare or pomp and circumstance. Genesis 3:1 says, “*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*” Smoke and mirrors, facades, lighting, sound effects, gentle music—he will do whatever it takes to create the most effective, subtle strategy. Imperceptibility is his aim. He is after you to discourage, distract, detour, and destroy you. He will use any means—your perceptions, circumstances, thought life, feelings, and the words of others—to try to accomplish his purposes and shepherd you along his path.

The world, with all of its bells and whistles, its fancy marketing ploys, and its pressure tactics, surrounds us on all sides, selling every way but God's way. The world's ways are upside down and backwards. “*For the wisdom of this world is folly with God*” (1 Cor. 3:19).

Our flesh and its frailty is with us wherever we go. Sometimes we can be our own worst



enemy because the flesh wars against the Spirit. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”* (Gal. 5:17). We have been given a new nature, but the old one still remains and must be put to death daily. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16) will not be utterly destroyed until we are in heaven with the Lord.

We live in a sinful world with sinful people, including ourselves. We will face difficulty. Are we vulnerable? Yes. Defenseless? No. In spite of what our thoughts, our circumstances, or our feelings might be telling us, we have not been left alone. When we are in Christ, we are in Him! He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. David writes about the Lord’s faithfulness, *“ . . . I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy”* (Ps. 63:6-7). Can you say the same? Do you sing in the shadow of His wings? Is God your hiding place? Run to Him for protection. Be ready when the attack comes your way. What do you do when you get hit broadside with something unexpected? Are you poised and ready to run to what you know to be true of God, regardless of the circumstances? Is God your God? Know Him. Love Him. Do you really believe what you think you believe? Do you hold fast to that belief, or do you give in to pressures and doubts? Sometimes unbelief can be subtle and hard to recognize. This is when seeking after the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength really pays off. It is in these times that our faith is tested and strengthened. We need to know where to run. *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe”* (Prov. 18:10).

David gives us a powerful and beautiful image of the hope and safety we can have in the Lord. He knows His Lord. He is his strength and his shield. He chooses to hide himself in the shadow of the Almighty. By faith he believes, truly believes, that under God’s wings he will find safety. In times of deep difficulty, in the pit of despair, in the midst of confusion, we too can remember God’s past deliverance, His mighty hand, and His tender love towards us.

At the time David is writing these words, he was fleeing from his wicked son, Absalom. What is David’s response? Do we see him wrestling with a myriad of escape scenarios, fretting, or pacing nervously? No, David is focusing his thoughts and his heart on his God. He remembers God and how He has been his help. David shelters himself in the rich memories of the Lord’s past provision and protection, and strengthens himself with songs of joy. He knows God is sovereign, he believes that God is in control, and he acts on that belief, despite what he may be feeling. In other words David walked by faith. Charles Spurgeon, the author of the Christian classic *Morning and Evening*, gives us a



helpful reminder about faith: “Christian, take good care of thy faith; for recollect faith is the only way whereby thou canst obtain blessings. If we want blessings from God, nothing can fetch them down but faith.”<sup>1</sup>

The trials and tribulations we go through are not wasted. They have great purpose. They strengthen our faith and help us strengthen others. Some time ago, I was counseling a woman who was in the midst of a difficult marriage situation, and I was trying to help her fight the fight of faith. After she left, I thanked the Lord and praised Him for all the trials I had been through. I knew at that moment, in a way I had never known before, that because of the struggles my husband and I had been through in our marriage, I had the wisdom, experience, and comfort to draw upon for this woman. As we walk forward in believing faith, we can hide ourselves in the shadow of His wings and sing—yes, sing—songs of praise to our God, knowing that He is good, *all* the time. We can trust Him and His ways. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The joy of the Lord shall be our strength; it shall be the song we sing amidst the whirlpool of tribulation. *“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 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”* (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Our enemies can be from within and from without. They take on all shapes and sizes. David’s prayer in Psalm 35 is a helpful guide for us to use when we face our enemies. Read the following passage and observe how much David looks to God to be his defense, his shield, and his deliverer. Remember, we are never alone. He has promised us that He will never leave or forsake us.

*Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! 2 Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help! 3 Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers! Say to my soul, “I am your salvation!” Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life! 4 Let them be turned back and disappointed who devise evil against me! 5 Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away! 6 Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them! 7 For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life. 8 Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it! And let the net that he hid ensnare him; let him fall into it—to his destruction!*  
(Ps. 35:1-8)



# T a k e R e f u g e i n H i m

## D A Y T W O

The days are evil, but the Lord is our hiding place, and we can always find shelter in His almighty wings. This week we'll be blessed as we gain a clearer picture of our "hiding place" and our great God who chose to dwell among His people. He is our real place of refuge and safety. We want to learn how to fully rely upon Him. We all need to learn how to find our shelter under the cover of His almighty wings! Recite the following verses from David's psalms and ponder his perspective. Take each one to heart by writing a simple prayer below each verse.

*Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings. (Ps. 17:8)*

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. (Ps. 36:7)*

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. (Ps. 57:1)*

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. (Ps. 91:1)*



Read Psalm 17.

What does David ask God to do?

What does David say he does?

What does David say God will do for those who take refuge in the shadow of His wings?



David made it a habit to take refuge in the Lord. He asks for one thing from the Lord: *“that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. 5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.”* (Ps. 27:4-5). David is using a figure of speech to describe his daily walk with the Lord. God wants us to dwell in His house and find refuge in His shelter as well. The house of the Lord during David’s time was a tent which dated back to the time of Moses. When God called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt to the promised land, He instructed them to build a house of worship, literally a tent of worship, that they could transport with them through the wilderness. This tent was where God would meet with them. God instructed Moses to have several items made and placed within the tent that had spiritual meaning. We can learn a lot about our “hiding place” from the portion of Scripture that describes this “tent of meeting.” Jesus is our hiding place. God’s Word is our hiding place. Studying the tabernacle (this “tent of meeting”) will help us in times of trouble to “tabernacle” in Christ and in His Word, or in other words, to look to Him, bow before His throne, and hide ourselves in the shadow of His wings.

We are going to read about the tabernacle from Exodus 25-26 today, but first, I want to help give you some understanding and context for what you are about to read so that you can read freely without being overwhelmed or confused. The following is a summary of the key points God was conveying to His people.

**God wants to be among His people.**

*And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.* (Ex. 25:8)

*And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. 22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.* (Ex. 25:21-22)

**God’s holiness required a separation from Him by the veil.**

*And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. 32 And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. 33 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. 34 You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place. 35 And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.* (Ex. 26:31-35)

**There is a specific way God must be approached.**

*Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Ex. 25:9)*

*And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. (Ex. 25:40)*

Additionally, it will be helpful to take a quick look at the holy items mentioned in Exodus 25-26 and a brief description of each to help you keep your bearings as you read.

**Support for the Tabernacle (25:1-9)**

The people had to supply the goods to build the sanctuary since they were out in the desert. God wanted them to give practical things (yarn, linen, goat hair) with a willing heart.

**The Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22)**

It was designed to carry the manna, the Ten Commandments, and Aaron's rod—objects that depicted God's covenant with Israel.

**The Mercy Seat (25:17)**

The lid to the Ark of the Covenant was made of solid gold and called the "mercy seat."

**The Cherubim (25:18-22)**

Cherubim are attendants of God. The people were to cast two gold cherubim that would be attached to the top of the Ark (the mercy seat).

**The Bread Table (25:23-30)**

This was a table made of wood, overlaid with gold. Like the Ark, it also had rings attached at each corner so that poles could be used to move it. Bread of special significance was displayed on this table, twelve loaves of the bread of the Presence (Lev. 24:5).

**The Lampstand (25:31-40)**

If you have ever seen a menorah, that is what is being described here. This menorah, however, had beautiful cups cast in the shape of open flowers in several places up and down each branch.

**The Curtains (26:1-14)**

The place of worship the Israelites were building was essentially a rectangular tent—a room or place of worship in the desert. The first set of curtains described are the walls of the tent. They would have contained embroidered pictures of cherubim. These curtains would be hung up by the frames.

### **The Frames (26:15-30)**

The wooden frames that are described here give the tabernacle a roughly rectangular shape. These frames were basically wooden posts with a couple of protrusions coming out of the bottom of each post that would fit into a silver base (think of the shape of electrical plugs and outlets).

### **The Dividing Veil (26:31-35)**

Another purple, blue, and scarlet curtain was to be placed inside the tent. This curtain served the important function of dividing the tabernacle up into sections—a holy place and a most holy place. The curtain was rectangular—four sheets hanging from four posts, giving the feel of having an additional “room” inside the tent. The Ark would be hidden away from common view on the other side of this curtain, inside this holiest of rooms.

### **The Entrance (26:36-37)**

The entrance to the entire structure would also be a curtain of the same color scheme.



Now read Exodus 25-26. In these chapters Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving instruction from God for the building of the tabernacle and its furniture. The imagery God is giving to Israel in the construction of the tabernacle, its furniture, and its placement right in the center of their camp is beautiful and helpful. It may be hard for us to understand all of the symbolism, but it is important for us to be aware of all the instruction and the details God gave to His people because He was giving them a picture of Christ. In your reading, try to observe how the items might have pointed to Christ. Please do not be concerned about understanding all of it. The Lord is our Shepherd and He leads us in His way and grants us understanding as we follow Him. As we seek after Him and His righteousness, we come to know Him in His Word more and more.

Note any personal observations or insights or questions you have. (As you read, you may find the tabernacle images from the ESV Study Bible helpful.)<sup>2</sup>

## TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# I i n H i m , H e i n M e

## D A Y T H R E E

The Bible tells us that we are *in* Christ—we are in Him and He is in us. He is our tabernacle, and He tabernacles in us. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16). He is our dwelling place, and we are truly able to dwell in His house all the days of our lives, to hide ourselves under the shadow of His mighty wings. He is our comfort and protection in the greatest storm or battle. Read the words of David in Psalm 27.

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? 2 When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. 3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. 4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. 5 For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. 6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. (Ps. 27:1-6)*

In the midst of difficulty, David makes a resolution. Read back through this passage and underline the reason David gives that he can resolve to dwell in the Lord. How can you have this same confidence?



When I am in the midst of fiery trials, under great attack from within or without, I have found it helpful to understand the tabernacle of the Old Testament. It has been a great comfort to envision His earthly tent, which is a picture of His heavenly tabernacle and finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. He is our great High Priest, the lamb of God who has taken away our sins, the one who promises to tabernacle with us forever, to never leave us or forsake us. He is the living Word, the light to our path. Today, we will continue reading about the tabernacle instructions in Exodus 27 and 30, but before we do, it will be helpful to look at the holy items mentioned in these chapters to give context. I have included a brief description of each.

### **The Bronze Altar, or Altar of Burnt Offerings (27:1-8)**

A square altar was to be built for sacrifices. Bronze fared much better against burning animal flesh than gold, which is why this metal was used to reinforce the altar. All the implements that sacrifices would require were also to be made of bronze. The altar, like the Ark, was to have rings hanging from the corners and poles to transport it.

As you consider the significance of the altar, keep in mind that the Bible says that when man sinned, that sin brought death. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23). So, under the sacrificial system He required the sacrifice of unblemished animals to pay the “wage” (the death) the people deserved and to atone for their sin. Atone essentially means to cover. Adam’s and Eve’s sacrifice didn’t actually atone for their sin; they were a representation, and offering them was an act of faith that looked forward to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. (Hebrews 9:22 says, “. . . *and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*”) The practice of ongoing animal sacrifices ended with Jesus, the unblemished lamb of God. Jesus came to be our sacrifice, to die in our place and pay our debt, once and for all. His blood was poured out at Calvary on the cross to atone for our sin.

### **The Tabernacle Court (27:9-19)**

Yet another layer of curtains was added, this time forming a perimeter around the entire structure.

### **The Oil (27:20-21)**

Olive oil was used to light the seven-candle lampstand previously described. The flame of the lamp was to be constantly maintained—all night, every night.

### **The Altar of Incense (30:1-10, 34-38)**

Made of wood and overlaid with gold, it too had rings attached so that poles could be used to move it. The Altar of Incense was located in front of the veil.

### **A Laver, or Basin (30:18-21)**

Made of bronze, this basin was used by the priest to wash his hands and feet before entering into and coming out of the Holy Place. Like the priests, we are washed by the water of the living Word, the living water, Jesus.



Now read Exodus 27 and 30. Imagine how God is portraying truth about himself and His Son in the description and construction of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the vestments for the priests. The tabernacle was being prepared as a place where God intended to meet with His people. Since He is holy, He had to make special provision for His people to be able to approach Him.

Write any notes, comments, or questions in the space provided below. Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Be encouraged. Seek after Him and His righteousness, and He will continue to reveal more and more of himself to you by His Spirit in His Word.



Taking the time to study these chapters is such a blessing, and we can gain a much clearer picture of our “hiding place” and our great God who chose to dwell among His people. He is our hiding place, and we can find shelter in His almighty wings! In the chapters following those we read in Exodus, God gave specific instructions for preparing this special place of worship. He even detailed the clothing priests should wear. Each article of clothing had a special meaning. For example, the breastplate the priest wore when he entered the Holy of Holies was adorned with twelve gems, each representing one of the tribes of Israel. The priest was their representative before God. What a beautiful picture of our great high priest, Jesus, as He goes before the throne of God on our behalf. He took upon himself all of our sin and then was slain for those sins, yet He was the spotless lamb of God. Not only is He our High Priest, He is our sacrifice! There are even more parallels to consider, but we don’t have the space to examine them all. Consider what God has done for you in Christ!



Piece by piece, God’s people carried out God’s commands exactly as He had instructed them. He then instructed Moses to take special measures to purify and consecrate the temple and the priests that would minister in the temple. Moses did exactly as God commanded. Finally, everything was accomplished. There, something special happened. Read the beautiful and awe-inspiring narration in Exodus 40:17-38.



In closing today read Hebrews 9. As you approach God, remember that it is in and through Christ that you are able to draw near. Write any notes or questions below.

Do you place your trust in Christ and in His righteousness? Do you remember the provision made for you so that you can confess your sins and be forgiven? Is Christ your dwelling place? Is He your shelter, your strong tower, your hiding place in every time of need? Is He your resting place?

Remember all God has done for you in Christ and the extravagant blessings given to you through Him.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# S t a n d F i r m i n t h e L o r d

## D A Y F O U R

Sometimes we will need to flee and run, and sometimes we will need to hide, but we must always stand firm in faith. The Lord is blessed as we learn to depend upon Him to be our strength.

*Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! 8 You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." 9 Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! 10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. 11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. 12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. 13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! 14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (Ps. 27:7-14)*

What does David ask for in verse 11?

What is his plan in verse 14?

What are some ways that David is depending on the Lord in these verses?



Let's take a close look at Psalm 91. It is a powerful psalm reciting the provision and protection we can depend on from our Lord, who is our refuge and fortress! Examine it carefully and list some of the promises below. Verses from this psalm are perfect arrows to carry in your quiver, so mark a few to memorize.



Read Ephesians 6:10-19. Look for the specific armor listed in this passage and circle each one.

Read through it a second time and focus on the commands Paul gives in this passage and underline them.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:10-19)*

List each piece of armor and its purpose.

Paul calls us to keep our perspective straight. He reminds us that our battles are not against our spouse, children, coworkers, committee members, or fellow church members, but our battle is “*against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*” (Eph. 6:12). As we face these evil, spiritual forces, we need to continually remind ourselves that the Lord is for us and not against us. “*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). He is training us to be strong, “*in the strength of His might*” (Eph. 6:10). Be encouraged! We have nothing to fear. Ever. What can you do each morning to remember to take up the amazing weapons and put on the supernatural armor the Lord has given to you to help you fight effectively and stand firm?



We must remember that we are not alone in the battle. Our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world are in the midst of the same struggle or worse, particularly those who are in leadership, on the mission field, or who preach the Word. Paul closes his letter with a request for the Ephesians to pray for him and all the saints. “[Pray] *at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel*” (Eph. 6:18-19). Close your time today with a prayer for those who are proclaiming the gospel. If it helps you make a list below of everyone you know in ministry; choose one of them and write a note of encouragement to them expressing how much you appreciate them and that you are praying for them.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# C o n s i d e r I t J o y

## D A Y F I V E

If God loves us, why do we ever have to run and hide under the shadow of His wings? Why wouldn't He simply spare us from trouble? We know that our heavenly Father could protect us from trials, temptations, and difficulties, but that would not accomplish His purposes. James states the purpose for the trials we face and exhorts us to live in this perspective.

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)*

How does James want us to view our trials? Looking closely at this passage, write the progression and end result of a godly response in difficult times.

Can you recall a time when you were in a trial that seemed unbearable, but when it was over you saw an eternal result (such as a real change in your strength, peace, and character—or even those changes in another person because of what God was doing in your life)?



James tells us the trials that the Lord allows to come into our life will equip and prepare us.

What do you hear from Paul in Romans 5:1-5 that echoes this? Be specific. Write the progression and the end result Paul gives.



Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11.

What do you learn about comfort, affliction, suffering, and trials from this passage? What is the purpose of the difficulties? What are the benefits?



Keep the previous 2 Corinthians passage in mind and read 2 Corinthians 2:14. What is being displayed through Paul as he trusts God through his difficulty?



Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Here, Paul describes the power of God demonstrated in him and through him. Christ is seen because of Paul's human limitations. In the midst of great pain and difficulty, Christ is the victor. What do you learn from this passage that you can apply to your own life?



Read Hebrews 4:14-16. What do you learn from this passage?

What can you do the next time a trial comes, when you feel pressure on every side or the enemy breathing down your neck? What can you do when your patience is beyond its limit, anger is building inside you, and you're about to explode?



As women we have many demands on our lives. Can you share an instance in your life during the past few weeks where you have failed miserably, been overwhelmed, frightened, discouraged, or depressed? Write your failure(s), fear(s), battle(s), or hurt(s) below.



I would like to close this week's study with Philippians 4:4-9, a practical and perhaps familiar passage. Remember you are *in* Christ and He is in you. He is your tabernacle and He tabernacles in you. Think about that for a moment. Paul explains in New Testament terms how to walk in this truth—how to live as David proclaimed when he tells us to hide in the shadow of His wings. Underline Paul's instructions.

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil. 4:4-9)*

Do you find rejoicing in your circumstances hard to comprehend—even harder to put into practice, maybe even utterly impossible? Paul says to rejoice! We know the trial, difficulty, or tribulation is for our benefit, protection, and God's glory, but Paul even says we can be thankful for it! He is echoing James' words to "*count it all joy.*" Can you do that? Praise God for the trials and tribulations you are experiencing lately and count them all joy. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us if we know the truth, believe the truth, and walk in the truth. Praise be to God Most High. That is truly being victorious! God is glorified, and the enemy is defeated again!

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

## DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

### **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

### **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# Your Right Hand Upholds Me

*My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Ps. 63:8)*

**M**y father had huge, very strong hands. As a carpenter, his hands could build or repair anything, creating and caring simultaneously. They are one of the things I remember best about him. He loved to take my hand and hold it in his, especially in church on Sunday morning. My little hand would be engulfed in his. There was such strength in those hands, but also great gentleness. In my childlike weakness, I rested in my father's strength. I knew a place of security.

The hand is the part of the body that enables a man to make tools, build, construct, and create. Thus, it is associated with power or control. The creative power of our hands is also a reflection of the image of God. God intended for us to use our hands to lovingly rule creation. *“And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’”* (Gen. 1:28).

Humanity failed to obey God. Instead, we used our hands to sin. But in eternity past, God purposed to reclaim a people for himself. He saw our sinful pride and rebellion beforehand and determined to make a way for His people to be in relationship with Him. Out of the depths of His love and mercy, He ordained that He would provide himself as the payment for our unpayable debt. He knew there would be no other means of rescue. So out of eternity, God reached forth His mighty, loving right hand into the pit of destruction to gather a people unto himself. He undertook for us what we were unable to do.

As He reveals to us our sinfulness, our helplessness, and His Son, and as we cry out to Him for mercy, we are rescued by His hand and pulled safely out of the darkness and into the light. We experience a radical transformation. The Bible tells us that once we were darkness, but now we are light (Eph. 5:8). Our sin has been forgiven, our debt has been cancelled, and we have been transferred from the kingdom of evil to the kingdom of God (Col. 1:13-14). But there is a mind-boggling, unexpected twist in the plot of God's marvelous plan. Even though we have been forgiven, our sin has



been paid for, and we have become His children, God has seen fit to leave us in our sinful bodies for now. How can this be? The holy, righteous God comes to dwell in our bodies even though they are still riddled and weak with sin. How can our weak, frail, and sinful jars of clay be a dwelling place for God? This is an amazing, incredible paradox! We are Holy Spirit indwelt, but still sin-dwelt. What do we do? Paul's answer is, "*Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:12-13). God sees us in His Son and considers our sin paid for, but we are given the task of working out our salvation with fear and trembling, all the while trusting in His mighty right hand to accomplish what we cannot.

God is sovereign and almighty. Nothing temporal can restrain the eternal power and love of God Most High, not the weakness of our flesh, the darkness of our sin, nor the wickedness of our hearts. When David says that God's right hand upheld him, of course he did not intend this reference literally; he is referring to the sovereign rule and power of God in his life. He is acknowledging God's reign and giving God the glory for his sustained life, for his perseverance in the faith, and for the guidance and protection that he knows is all around him by his omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Lord and King. It's childlike weakness held in the power of the Almighty.

David understands that he is weak, but God is strong. He tightly squeezes his Father's hand, knowing God is the one who has the real grip. David follows and clings to God, expecting Him to do all and to be all. He knows God's promises, and he believes them. "*My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me*" (Ps. 63:8). Do you cling to God in this way? Maybe you feel like you are doing well in this area. Even so, Andrew Murray challenges us, in his book *Absolute Surrender*, to think this through completely. "I am sure there are many believers here who are struggling to find out what they lack, believers who possibly have given themselves up most heartily and fully to Jesus, who do love Him, who have sought to humble themselves in the dust. But what they lack is that they have not learned simply to say: 'He has promised, and He will do it.'"<sup>1</sup> Are we able to simply trust His promises? Do we believe God, trust Him, and hold fast to Him, knowing He will do it? We want to know the strength of our Father's right hand and live according to this knowledge.

Not only does Scripture describe Jesus as being at God's right hand, it also presents God the Father as being at Jesus' right hand. God did not abandon His Son but brought Him back to life in the resurrection. "*For David says concerning [Jesus], 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also*



*will dwell in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption”* (Acts 2:25-27). When God comes to our rescue, He is “at our right hand.” Therefore, we can say with David, *“I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken”* (Ps. 16:8). Do you look to God as being mightily at your right hand? Or do you try to take things into your own hands? Our culture puts so much emphasis on man’s accomplishments attained through man’s efforts. People measure themselves and compare themselves with one another. Women have been pressured excessively by all the varied expectations placed on them, and in an effort to establish their place, women are often more competitive than they are compassionate. But we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ for good works, works that God ordained before the foundation of the world (Eph. 2:10), works that we are unable to do apart from Him. We are created to reflect and magnify God. We would be helpless to accomplish anything on our own, but as we follow Christ and keep our eyes fixed on Him, He who began a good work in us will bring it to pass! We can rest in these truths. Even now, His right hand sustains us. As we walk forward by faith, trusting and clinging to God, God does the work we are unable to do. He transforms our hearts and minds from the inside out. We become more and more like Jesus. Through His power and by His grace, we go forward, and God accomplishes what we could never do on our own. He transforms us as He keeps us.

Sometimes we feel that in order to be responsible adults, we have to take charge of things, make things happen, and do things by our own strength. We might even feel it’s irresponsible in the midst of great difficulty to just go to the Lord in prayer and then wait upon Him to direct and act. It can be hard to rest in a bulwark we cannot see, not unlike those disciples in the boat on that raging sea (Mark 4). They certainly thought they were going down! Their lives were on the line, and Jesus was sleeping through the storm. They were overwhelmed by their fear of the storm, but that fear changed to reverential fear when they realized (at least in part) whose presence they were in. Who was this man who could command the wind and the waves to be still? He was the one whose hand holds all authority.

Jesus is seated at God’s right hand, but here is an incredible, marvelous truth: God has placed us there with Him. *“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (Eph. 2:5-6). Where does Paul say we are seated? Right along with Christ! We have a place of security in Christ, and our heavenly Father will not allow us to fall headlong. He is Almighty God, our loving Father, and He is in absolute control of all things at all times. In our childlike weakness, may we rest in His strength and know this real place of security.



Rest in your Father's right hand this week. Each moment of each day, prayerfully step forward in obedience, clinging to your shepherd, resting in God's ability to work in your life, and looking to Him to accomplish His purposes. Watch Him work! In childlike weakness put your wayward child, your failing marriage, your struggling teen, your helpless grandchild, and your finite, feeble frame in God's mighty right hand and rest. As you do, you will know a newfound place of peace and security.



# H i s H a n d H o l d s P o w e r

## D A Y T W O

In our weakness and in our failings, God has us in His hands. He is in control—complete control. There is nothing beyond the boundary of God’s reign, even when we feel as though our failures may knock the earth off of its axis. Read the following passages that remind us of the power and control of God’s right hand.

*I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. (Ps. 16:8)*

*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:11)*

*You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great. (Ps. 18:35)*

*Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. (Ps. 20:6)*

*If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Ps. 139:9-10)*

It is important for us to always remember who created us, why we were created, and what our position is in creation and in Christ, particularly when we find ourselves viewing our world and our circumstances from our limited, incomplete, and imperfect perspective. We need to remember that it is Almighty God who reigns with His righteous right hand and in whose saving hand we are held. As you go throughout your day, consider each circumstance in light of the passages you read, taking every thought captive to the truth in His Word.



Read Exodus 15:1-21. This passage is a song of praise celebrating the Lord’s deliverance of Israel from the ruthless Pharaoh of Egypt, who treated them barbarously as slaves. Over and over, Pharaoh refused to release Israel from captivity as God had commanded. Pharaoh finally conceded to allow Israel to leave after God inflicted ten plagues on Egypt, the final and most severe plague being the death of every firstborn son. Once Israel departed, however, Pharaoh changed his mind. He marshaled his entire army to go after them and bring them back. Israel, blocked by the Red

Sea on one side and the oncoming Egyptian army on the other side, appeared to be doomed to die. But at the last minute, God miraculously parted the Red Sea. The Israelites were able to flee the Egyptians by crossing the sea on dry land. When Pharaoh's army followed, God closed up the sea over the army, killing them all. By His righteous right hand, God made a way where there seemed to be no way.



Read Isaiah 41:8-13. Write out the verse, word for word, that references the right hand of God and meditate on it for a moment. Take this truth to heart.



The Israelites were God's people. They knew God and the power of His mighty right hand. But In 1 Samuel 17 we see their faith put to the test. How do they respond? Do they look upon their situation with eyes of faith, or do they evaluate their circumstances based on what they see with their eyes?

What is the situation and how is their enemy described in verses 1-7?

What is the enemy saying in verses 8-10?

According to verse 11, how do King Saul and the people of Israel respond?

What happens in verses 12-18?

Read the remainder of the chapter, taking detailed notes as you read. Take special note of what happens when David hears the enemy and observes the response of Israel. What does he say and do? Where is his focus?

Compare David's focus and mindset to that of the rest of Israel. Where was their focus?

Can you relate to the Israelites' response? What caused them to shrink back? What are some things that tempt you to shrink back?



Do you struggle with worry and fear? How would that change if you truly believed in God's mighty sovereign power—His rule and reign over everything?



What situations are you evaluating from a human perspective? What might you be doing in your own way or in your own strength?



Lay these thoughts and feelings at the Lord's feet. Write a prayer confessing any fears, concerns, or needs.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# H i s H a n d H o l d s A u t h o r i t y

## D A Y T H R E E

The right hand is the symbol of authority. Look at where Jesus is seated according to Paul's prayer to the Ephesians:

*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Eph. 1:16-21)*

Look at where Paul goes on to say that we are seated later in this letter:

*... even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:5-6).*



It is hard for our minds to fully comprehend that Christ is seated in the heavens above all earthly powers. Where does Paul say we are seated? Right along with Christ! That knowledge should affect the way we think and live. Consider what the following passages say about Jesus and write the key phrases.

Matthew 26:63-64

Luke 22:69

Acts 5:31

Romans 8:34

Colossians 3:1

Hebrews 1:3

Hebrews 10:12

1 Peter 3:22



The Bible is clear about who is in charge and who upholds the universe by the word of His power. Jesus has gone into heaven, sits at the Father's right hand, and rules and reigns in every single situation, good or bad. Psalm 16:8 says, *"I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken."* On Day One I wrote that sometimes we feel that in order to be responsible adults we have to take charge of things, make things happen, and do things in our own strength. We might even feel it's irresponsible in the midst of great difficulty to just go to the Lord in prayer and then wait upon Him to direct and act. Give an example of how this may have played out in your life.



David understands Jesus is at his right hand. Prayerfully read Psalm 16.

*Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. 2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." 3 As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. 4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. 5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. 6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. 7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. 8 I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. 11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16)*

What does David say about his Lord in this passage?

Do you look to Jesus as being mightily at your right hand?

As you close your time with the Lord today, ask Him to help you think according to the truth of His Word and not according to your human perspective and your old ways of thinking. Write out Psalm 16:5-7. Affirm these truths and speak them to your heart, mind, and soul as you write.

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# H i s H a n d B l e s s e s

## D A Y F O U R

The right hand is the hand that blesses. We see this graphically portrayed in Genesis 48 where Jacob blesses Joseph's younger son, Ephraim, over the older son, Manasseh. Through this example, which demonstrated a departure from the custom of the time in which the oldest son received the blessing, we are given a picture of the power, reign, and sovereignty of God in His perfect ways—ways that do not conform to man's ways.

*And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). . . 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." 19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." (Gen. 48:14, 17-19)*

In a similar way, God demonstrated His power, sovereignty, and blessing in Abraham's life. Abraham, who first went by *Abram*, was called the friend of God, and his story serves as a powerful visual tool to help us understand all the Lord wants to accomplish in and through our lives. As we enjoy a deep, abiding relationship with the Lord and obediently walk by faith, we come to know more fully who He is and believe more deeply that what He has promised, He will do. Abraham trusted God to fulfill His promises. Read this passage from Genesis and consider what God asked of Abram, what He promised to him, and what Abram's response was to God.

*Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 4 So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:1-5)*

God chose Abraham (then Abram) and set him apart from a land of idolaters. God was making a people for himself that would worship Him until the coming of the Messiah. The command God gave to Abraham is similar to the call of the gospel. Our earthly nature must give way to divine grace. Sin must be forsaken, along with the things we hold dear. Abram left his home and his family, clung to the Lord, and followed Him, not knowing where he was going. We cannot cling to the Lord unless we are willing to leave self and earthly comforts and pursuits behind. Is there anything in your life today that you wouldn't be willing to leave in order to follow Christ?



The blessings promised to Abraham are promised to the faithful, to those who are obedient to the call of the gospel. Abraham was often tried and tested as to whether or not he would love God above all, whether he would leave all to go with God, and whether he would trust God to fulfill His promises in all circumstances, no matter what. Read the passages listed below about the shepherding of Abraham by God and how Abraham's faith in God and His promises are finally and firmly established. This may seem like a lot of reading, but the narrative shared in these chapters is foundational to our faith, our understanding of the gospel, and essential for us to study. Make brief notes in each section to help you remember the key points.

Genesis 12:4-20

Genesis 13

Genesis 15

Genesis 17

Genesis 20-22:19



Read Romans 4:16-25 and underline key phrases that mention Abraham and Sarah's faith in God or that indicate God's powerful right hand blessing them and performing that which they were unable to perform.

*. . . the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:16-25)*



Do we have the faith of Abraham? Will we leave all to follow Christ as Abraham followed God? Will we cling to God and walk with Him as He leads and blesses us by His mighty right hand? George Whitefield said, "Before a person can be said to walk with God, the prevailing power of this heart-enmity must be destroyed: for persons do not walk and keep company together, who entertain an irreconcilable enmity and hatred against one another. . . . It is destroyed in every soul that is truly born of God, and gradually more and more weakened as the believer grows in grace, and the Spirit of God gains a greater and greater ascendancy in the heart."<sup>2</sup> This is what God did with Abraham. He shepherded Abraham and his heart over the course of many years and through many trials to bring Abraham to the point of being able to walk with God and in His promises. We see that God's right hand of blessing in Abraham's life wasn't only in the promises He gave to Abraham, but also in the heart He gave to him. Abraham is our great example of believing in the promises of God and learning to trust in Him and His ways.

Abraham faltered in his understanding and struggled along the way. We will all have to wrestle against the flesh that wars against the Spirit in order to walk in the promises of God. In the process, we too will falter and struggle. But when we do, we can remind ourselves of these promises from the Old and New Testaments:

*"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you'" (Isa. 41:13 NIV).*

*“I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)*

*“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:1-3).*

Like Abraham, we can believe in the promises of God. We can trust the God who promises to justify us, and we can know that God is always able to do what He has promised. Paul gives us a picture of God’s faithfulness and commitment to his people that we can rest in today: *“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24).*

How will you choose to think differently after observing God’s love for Abraham and Abraham’s struggle to understand, believe, trust, and rest in God’s promises (1 Pet. 3:6)?



Close today in a prayer of praise, confession, and thanksgiving. Ask the Lord to give you the faith of Abraham and to comprehend, believe, and trust in His promises.

### **TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART**

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

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

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

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



# H i s   H a n d   B i n d s

## D A Y   F I V E

Our God knew that we were unable to fight our battles without His strength, without His power. Acts 2:25 says, “*For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken.’*” But in God’s mercy we are not alone. We are bound to Jesus, and He is bound to us in covenant. The Lord gives us a picture of this beautiful covenant relationship in the covenant friendship between David and King Saul’s son, Jonathan. Jonathan binds himself to David in covenant.

*As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. . . . 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (1 Sam. 18:1, 3-4)*

What happens to Jonathan’s soul? How is his Christlike affection for David described?

What does Jonathan give to David?

Think of Jonathan’s initiative with David as a picture of Christ’s relationship with you. Write your thoughts. How might that impact you?



Let’s look more closely at the meaning and symbolism of two of the words in the 1 Samuel passage we just read: *knit* and *robe*.

**Knit:** We are told that “*the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David.*” The word *knit* in Hebrew carries with it the meaning of “to bind or to tie something together.”<sup>3</sup> When used with human beings, it is the idea of binding people together, or of two people being bound inseparably in love. The word defines a relationship characterized by deep, undying devotion.

Figuratively, we see this idea in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, when God instructs Israel to bind His law to their hearts. “*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. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”*

In the New Testament, the idea of being “knit together” or “welded together” is used by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:1-2. *“I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ.”* Paul wants them to be “knit together in love.” The love of Jesus is the glue that binds us together, just as the body is held together by joints and ligaments. One of the strengths of the church is the unity produced by Christ’s love. If we are truly knit together by the love of Christ, why wouldn’t we have a deep, undying devotion to our fellow believers?

**The Robe:** We are told that *“Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David.”* The term *robe* refers to a long, sleeveless shawl of blue or purple fabric. There was a hole in the middle which was pulled over the head. It was worn by men of honor and royalty.<sup>4</sup> The robe could be used in deeply symbolic ways to express the emotional life of the soul. For example, when a man’s heart was torn by grief, he would demonstrate his inner emotion by outwardly tearing his robe. When Jonathan made a covenant with David, he gave him his robe, outwardly expressing his inner emotions. Jonathan was entering into an undying covenant with David and offering to David all that he had to give. The exchange of robes symbolized an exchange of identity and a sharing of identities with the other person.



Jesus is our Jonathan. He has given us His armor and His resources; He is our covenant Lord. He has given us His life, not just symbolically, but literally. He has given us His robes of righteousness—himself and His identity. He is for us. He is on our side. He will fight our enemies.

Read Ephesians 6:11-20. As you read, think through the words as if Jesus is your Jonathan and He is giving you His armor and His resources. List all the armor God has provided to those who belong to Him in covenant.

Paul says to fasten on the belt of truth. The belt held the sword, and it also held up the robe during battle. The sword was a small, hand-held, two-edged thrusting sword used as an offensive weapon, which was effective in hand-to-hand combat. The sword of the Spirit, Paul tells us, is the Word of God. The helmet was a headpiece to guard and protect the head in battle, and the breastplate was armor to shield the heart and other vital organs during battle. It covered the body from the neck to the thighs. The word for shield was also used to denote a large, oblong-shaped door that acted as a cover for the entrance of a cave. This word for door also described the shield a soldier would carry.

We are to use all these tools against the schemes of the devil. The kingdoms of the world are under Satan's control. Even Jesus was tested in Luke 4:5-6, *"The devil took [Jesus] up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.'"* Jesus even called Satan *"the prince of this world"* (John 12:31; 14:30). But God is far more powerful than the devil. While Satan is mighty, never forget that God is almighty.



We can't fight our battles without God's strength and power any more than David could. But that is exactly what He gives us: His strength and power. We are knit together with the Lord in a covenant relationship that will never falter and never end. As the prayer of Jesus before His crucifixion shows, we are one with the Father and the Son.

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23)*

Read this passage again slowly and prayerfully and then write a prayer to the One who is your Savior and covenant Lord.



As our study comes to a close and we contemplate the truths in Psalm 63, we hear through David's words that he knew where to run in time of need. He knew his Lord and he understood God's power and His compassion. He knew how to approach Him and how to depend upon Him.

Turn back to the prayer that you wrote in answer to the last question from Day 5 of Lesson 2 and reflect on all God has been teaching you. Carefully think through Psalm 63:1-8 and what you have learned in this study. Take time now to sit before the Lord quietly and pray. Ask Him to do for you what only He can do. Remember, it is His mighty right hand that moves us from darkness to light, from death to life, and from lukewarm to hot. He is your Beloved. Be specific in your prayers and believe that He will do it. Thank the Lord for all you have learned and ask Him to continue to teach you as you walk forward in the new truths you have gleaned. Praise be to God!

Additional Taking the Truth to Heart pages have been included at the end of this lesson for you to assimilate the truths from the entire study. Review each of the Day Six Taking the Truth to Heart pages from each lesson and fill out the final Taking the Truth to Heart based on those. May the Lord give you great encouragement as you see what He has done!

### TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart & Bringing It to Life

DAY SIX

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

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet. 3:18)*

## **PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back**

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

Write a statement to share with your small group about how you did with your

Taking the Truth to Heart Step Three from last week.

## **STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart**

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart

and write it out (Rom. 12:2).

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

### **STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death**

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of due to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also include an example of where you saw the evidence of this sin in your life this week.

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

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

### **STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life**

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

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

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

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

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



# Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

NAME	<b>Step One</b> <i>TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART</i> SCRIPTURE	<b>Step Two</b> <i>PUTTING THE FLESH TO DEATH</i> SIN	<b>Step Three</b> <i>BRINGING THE TRUTH TO LIFE</i> ACTION
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# Review & Reflect

Read the following review. Joyfully reflect on all the Lord has taught you and praise Him! Ask Him to sow these truths into your heart and into your life. My prayer is that the truths you have learned in this study would be deeply rooted in your heart and bear an abundant harvest.

## **O God, You Are My God**

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

- There is nothing the Lord Jesus wants more than for us to truly know Him.
- God's love is essential and foundational to every part of our lives.
- Absolutely nothing compares to a fully devoted love relationship with God Most High.
- Without realizing it, many Christians exhibit the symptoms of a divided heart, where God is perhaps not truly on the throne of their life and heart.
- Our love for God flows out of our heart response to God's love for us. In order to fall in love again with our Lord, we must first meditate on the great love He has displayed for us.

## **Earnestly I Seek You**

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

- If we want a deep relationship with God above all else, we must listen to Him in His Word, talk with Him, and long after Him, the way David did.
- Drawing near to God means listening to Him, hearing His heart, knowing His thoughts, and following His ways. But this all begins with listening—listening with ears that can hear.
- Understanding more fully what the Lord says He is going to do with our hearts and what our responsibility is to do what He has commanded, we can learn to earnestly seek after God.
- To truly seek the Lord earnestly, we must be willing to make the investment.



### **My Soul Thirsts for You**

*My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Ps. 63:1b)*

- If we are to thirst after God and His righteousness, we must identify, confess, and turn from our unrighteous ways.
- In our thirst for God and His righteousness, it is profitable to take time to reflect on how our hearts are responding to God's Word when we read it or listen to it.
- We have been given Christ. We are to walk in the Spirit, not in the flesh.
- When we confess our unrighteousness and we hunger and thirst after His righteousness, we are cleansed and washed clean!

### **Your Power and Glory**

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. (Ps. 63:2)*

- The Bible begins by saying that God spoke the heavens and the earth into being. Creating out of nothing with a word. That is power beyond anything we can fully understand.
- Creation is not finally governed by nature, but by God. He alters nature and the order of events whenever He pleases that He may be acknowledged to be creation's only Lord and Master.
- God's power and glory are demonstrated supremely through His Son, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.
- God's power and glory will be revealed not only to us but to others as we ascribe to Him the glory He is due. What could be more wonderful than to have our lives display God's power and glory?

### **Your Lovingkindness**

*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. (Ps. 63:3-4)*

- The greatest love of all has been demonstrated in the greatest sacrifice.
- God's lovingkindness is demonstrated powerfully in His amazing grace.
- We must pray that we would comprehend, believe, and receive His love.
- As we fully receive His love, let us proclaim His love with our lips and with our lives.

### **My Soul Is Satisfied**

*My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night. (Ps. 63:5-6)*



- God's Word tells us that when we truly trust the Lord and revere Him and do not rely on our human perspective, it will be a refreshment to our bones.
- Knowing and understanding God's intimate knowledge of us and His sovereignty in our lives will bring profound peace and satisfaction deep within our souls.
- True satisfaction comes when we believe God, trust Him fully, respond to His call upon our lives, and walk according to His purposes and not our own.
- God has created us to find our greatest satisfaction in Him and in doing His will.

### **In the Shadow of Your Wings**

*For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. (Ps. 63:7)*

- We need to keep our eyes on the Lord and seek Him at all times. The days are evil, but the Lord is our hiding place, and we can always find shelter in His almighty wings.
- The Bible tells us that we are in Christ—we are in Him and He is in us. He is our tabernacle, our dwelling place, and we are truly able to dwell in His house all the days of our lives and to hide ourselves under His wings.
- Sometimes we will need to flee and run, and sometimes we will need to hide, but we must always stand firm in faith! The Lord is blessed when we learn to depend on Him to be our strength.
- God loves us, and the trials, temptations, and difficulties we face accomplish His purposes.

### **Your Right Hand Upholds Me**

*My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Ps. 63:8)*

- We need to remember that it is Almighty God who reigns with His righteous right hand. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. It is in His saving hand that we are held.
- God's right hand is the hand that blesses. He demonstrated His power, sovereignty, and blessing in Abraham's life. Abraham's story serves as a powerful tool to help us understand all the Lord wants to accomplish in and through our lives.
- By God's hand we are bound to Jesus, and He is bound to us in covenant. The Lord gives us a picture of this in the relationship between David and King Saul's son, Jonathan.

## TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

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



# Appendix





INTRODUCTION  
Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

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





LESSON ONE  
O God, You Are My God

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





LESSON TWO:  
Earnestly I Seek You

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





LESSON THREE :  
My Soul Thirsts for You

*My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Ps. 63:1)*





## LESSON FOUR: Your Power and Glory

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. (Ps. 63:2)*





LESSON FIVE:  
Your Lovingkindness

*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. (Ps. 63:3-4)*





LESSON SIX:  
My Soul Is Satisfied

*My soul is satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,  
when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night. (Ps. 63:5-6)*





LESSON SEVEN:  
In the Shadow of Your Wings

*For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. (Ps. 63:7)*





LESSON EIGHT:  
Your Right Hand Upholds Me

*My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Ps. 63:8)*





## Endnotes

### Lesson One

1 This line of thinking and explanation can be found in Iain M. Duguid, *Song of Songs*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016). An excerpt from this book may be helpful:

I believe it is possible to steer a middle ground between the allegorical and literal extremes; to recognize the Song of Songs [Song of Solomon] as wisdom literature that celebrates a great mystery in life, the mutual love of a man and a woman (Prov.30:19), yet that in this celebration will not only shape our thinking about human relationships but also show us profound insights into the love that Christ has for his bride, the church. Suppose that the Sunday school teacher had described a sparrow and then gone on to teach her students about God's care for the little sparrow and his far greater fatherly care for us. The sparrow is not Jesus; it remains just a sparrow. Yet the lesson that is drawn from the sparrow can and must still center appropriately on Jesus, as the One who shows us the full extent of God's fatherly love and care for us. So, too, we don't need to make the man in the Song of Songs into an allegory or a type of Jesus to see how the book points us to "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that will follow." (xviii-xix)

2 R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 8.

3 Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 6-7.

4 The *invisible* church is spiritual in nature and consists of all those past and present who are truly born again and so are in spiritual union with Christ. The *visible* church is institutional in nature and consists of all those who identify themselves with the church regardless of their true spiritual status. One may hold membership in the visible church and not be saved, but every member of the invisible church is saved by definition.

5 Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of All the Books of the Old and New Testaments*, 9 vols. (Berwick: W. Baynes, 1804), 2:705.

6 Phillip Keller, "A Shepard Looks at Psalm 23" in *Phillip Keller: The Inspirational Writings* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1993), 98-100.

7 *Ibid.*, 104.

## Lesson Two

- 1 Thomas R. Schreiner, “Why We Must Understand the Covenants to Understand the Bible,” Crossway, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-we-must-understand-the-covenants-to-understand-the-bible/> (accessed July 17, 2019). Schreiner is the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology; Associate Dean of the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- 2 William A. VanGemeren, “Shema” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:175.
- 3 Spiros Zodiatas and Warren Baker, “Ahav” in *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, Word Study Series (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1994), 2298.
- 4 VanGemeren, 1:277-289. Notes the range of intensity in this word, as well as specific examples of usage in the Old Testament.
- 5 J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 301.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 301.

## Lesson Three

- 1 These questions partially are in reference to 2 Tim. 3:1-5.
- 2 This is not to say that if we sin we can lose our salvation. (In the context of John 7, if the river of living water ceased, it would mean the person is no longer saved.)
- 3 For further clarification and support for this idea, see: George Whitefield, *George Whitefield Daily Readings*, ed. Randall J. Pederson (Scotland: Christian Heritage/Christian Focus Publications, 2010), entry for August 24.

To walk with God implies that the Spirit of God removes the power of the natural heart. Perhaps it may seem hard to some, but our own experience daily proves what the Scriptures in many places assert, that the carnal mind, the mind of the unconverted man, and even the mind of the regenerate, so far as any part of him remains unrenewed, is enmity against God himself. Indeed, one may well wonder that any creature, especially that lovely creature man, made after his Maker’s own image, should have any enmity, much less a prevailing enmity, against that very God in whom he lives, moves, and has his being. But so it is.

- 4 “Confession and Petition” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 77.
- 5 This thought is credited to Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington, associate professor of New Testament interpretation and director of Research Doctoral Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

6 “The Deeps” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 75.

7 Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone: 365 Devotional Readings Updated in Today’s Language* (World Pub, 1998), Good Reads, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/536291-by-faith-alone> (accessed July 17, 2019).

#### Lesson Four

1 Johann Friedrich Zihn, “God Liveth Ever!,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-book*, Hymn #513, trans. Cathrine Winkworth (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1918), 504-506. The text of this hymn is available online at [http://www.hymnary.org/text/god\\_liveth\\_ever](http://www.hymnary.org/text/god_liveth_ever) (accessed February 17, 2014). This hymn is quoted by Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening: Daily Readings* (1866; reprint Scotland: Christian Focus Press, 1997), entry for August 12, Morning.

2 Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening: A New Edition of the Classic Devotional Based on The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, rev. and ed. Alistair Begg (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), entry for August 16, Morning.

3 John Piper, “What Is God’s Glory?” (sermon, Minneapolis, MN, July 6, 2009), Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory> (accessed August 2013).

#### Lesson Five

1 Ira D. Sankey, *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns and of Sacred Songs and Solos* (Philadelphia: Sunday School Times Co., 1906), 186.

2 “The Grace of the Cross” in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 170.

#### Lesson Six

1 Peter Hammond, “Jonathan Edwards—A Mind on Fire for Christ,” The Reformation Society, 2013, available at <http://www.reformation.org/index.php/history/93-jonathan-edwards-a-mind-on-fire-for-christ> (accessed September 17, 2013).

2 Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018 [reprint]), 25.

#### Lesson Seven

1 Spurgeon, entry for March 19, Morning.

2 You can find these here:

[https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration\\_02\\_tabernacle-tent/](https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration_02_tabernacle-tent/)

[https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration\\_02\\_tabernacle/](https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration_02_tabernacle/).

## Lesson Eight

1 Andrew Murray, *Absolute Surrender* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1895; reprint Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2012), 4. Portions of this book are available online at <http://bit.ly/2vDLYbC> (accessed July 18, 2017).

2 Whitefield, entry for August 24.

3 The definition is paraphrased and taken from “H7194 - *qashar* – Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (NASB),” Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H7194&t=NASB> (accessed September 10, 2013). Larry Pierce created the “Outline of Biblical Usage” section which we have followed here.

4 The definition is paraphrased and taken from “H4598 - *mēil* - Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (NASB),” Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?Strong=H4598&t=NASB> (accessed September 10, 2013). Larry Pierce created the “Outline of Biblical Usage” section which we have followed here. We have also followed *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, s.v. “*mēil*,” trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1857), as cited on Blue Letter Bible.