

Hello and Welcome!

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



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

Thank you for previewing this book!

Heart of a Woman

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY



Focus Scripture

THE PSALMS

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



Heart of a Woman

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24

by Laurie Aker

In Pursuit of Spirit-filled Hearts

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

Prov. 4:23

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study
Heart of a Woman

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



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. 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.

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 iv 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 (click Discipleship Studies tab) and website (click 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 lecture 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 Exhibit A at the end of this section, on page vii, for an example) to let

- their leader know how they completed their homework, so the leader can help them keep their commitment to the Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment (see Exhibit B, page vii) 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” page, which is completed at the end of each lesson on Day Six. To allow time for all women to share, a time limit of three minutes is set for each person. Keeping a strict time limit helps keep the focus on God and His Word. 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.
- 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

- At the end of each lesson, on Day Six, complete your “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Example C).
- 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.
- Homework will take approximately 30 minutes each day.

Day One

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

Days Two-Five

- 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.
- 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.
- You will also be led each day through the Taking the Truth to Heart process according to the steps outlined on Day One of each lesson.
- You will have an opportunity to discuss the homework when your small group meets. If you're not in a group, feel free to ask questions or share answers at info@thistlebend.org. Online participants may communicate directly with their online group leader.

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

- This day provides a way for you to review, assimilate, and apply the truths God has revealed to you during the week.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart” section at the end of the lesson is completed by reviewing the tree (see Exhibit C) at the end of the lesson and filling in the information requested.
- 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.

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! However, if you need to miss class:

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

Note

Examples referenced are located on the following page. These and others can also be found on our app (click Begin Here) and website (click Resources).

Exhibit 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

Exhibit C

Day Six

— • —

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

Lesson One begins the Taking the Truth to Heart process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We have been instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits, sinful actions and/or words, on the tree located on the opposite page. The small group time in class will end each week with the Taking the Truth to Heart time. Each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share the sinful fruit from their trees, again being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

James 5:16 says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”* Remember, we are observing the outer man so that we can better understand the inner man. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and understanding—for eyes to see your behaviors and ears to hear your words in such a way that you are able to understand the remaining sin in your heart. Praise God for His great mercy and take in the amazing grace of His gospel. Keep your eyes on your Savior, the author and perfecter of your faith.

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

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

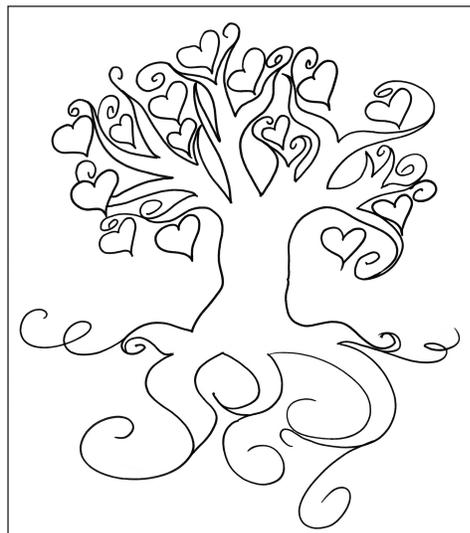


Exhibit B



THISTLEBEND MINISTRIES

Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment

Affirmation

The goal and focus of this discipleship study is to learn how to:

- Live the gospel by grace through faith
- Grow in our understanding of true discipleship
- Love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself
- Live for Christ because He died for us.

Practically, this means earnestly pursuing the following by God's grace:

- Believing You Have Received the Spirit of Sonship
- Denying Self
- Offering Yourself as a Living Sacrifice
- Living as Members of One Body
- Faithful Obedience
- Speaking the Truth in Love

Commitment

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

- I will submit by God's grace to God and His Word, my leaders, and to one another.
- I commit by God's grace to attending both class and small group each week.
- I commit by God's grace to spend a specific amount of time doing my study homework or to complete each day's lesson.
- I commit by God's grace to completing my homework on a daily basis.
- I commit by God's grace to memorizing the key Scripture passage on a weekly basis.
- I make this commitment by God's grace before the Lord and my small group.
- I sign this document being fully aware it is the grace of God that will enable me to remember these affirmations and keep these commitments.

Exhibit D

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

(Complete in your small group.)

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit

A PRAYER OF INTENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOT IN ME

By Eric Schumacher & David L. Ward

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

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

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

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

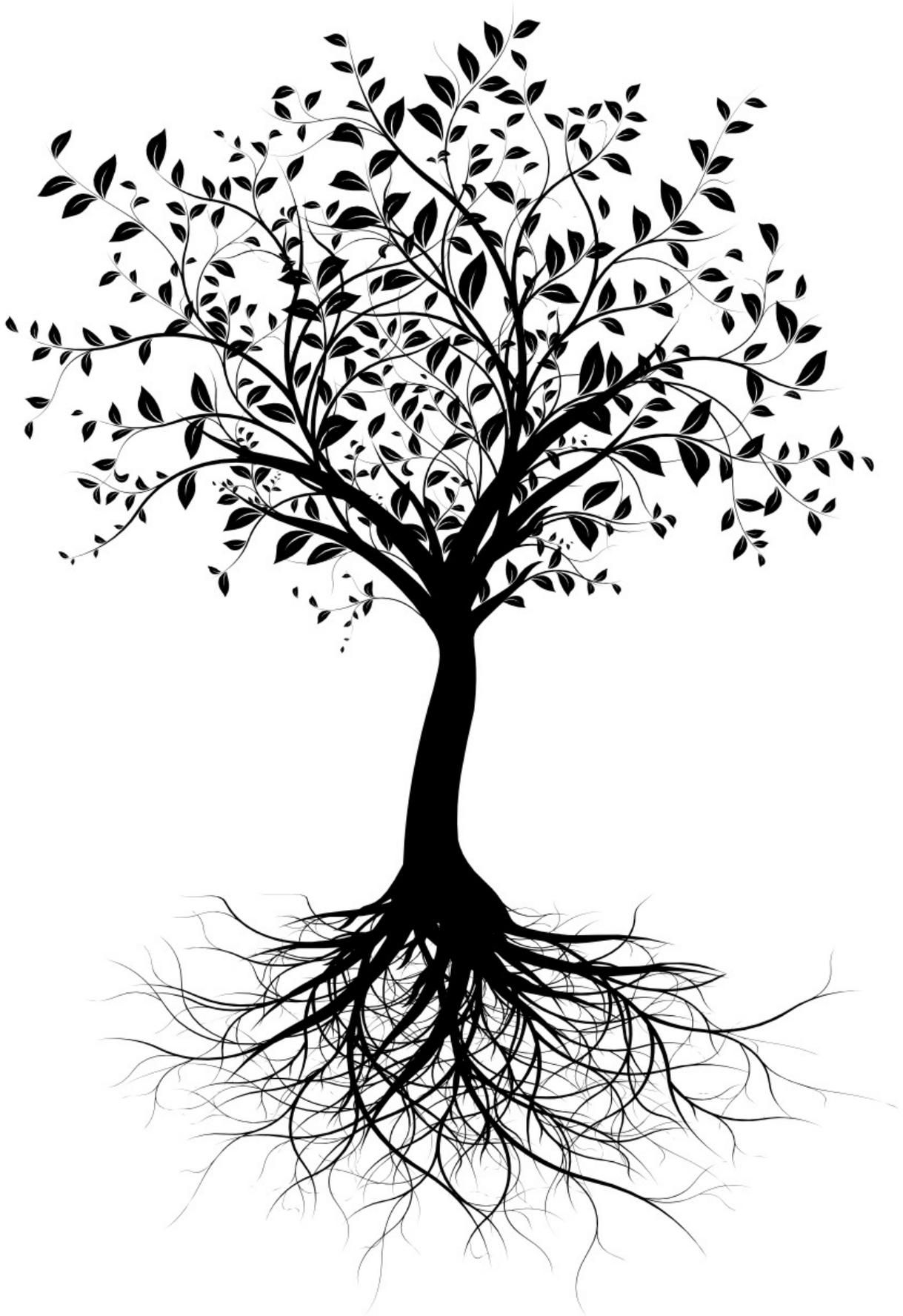
No separation from the world,
No work I do, no gift I give,
Can cleanse my conscience, cleanse my hands;
I cannot cause my soul to live.

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

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



Planted by Streams of
Water



Day One



Planted by Streams of Water

As I sit high atop Signal Mountain, it is a crisp, clear, cold winter day with the brightest of bright, blue skies. There is not a cloud in sight. I love this kind of sky. My son Noel, though, insists there must be at least a few clouds to break up the expanse of blue. But without a doubt, the endless blue sky is my favorite. The light is streaming in the windows, there is low humidity, and you can see forever. It is such a different day than yesterday.

Yesterday was a dark, rainy, and foggy day. I was heading to my daughter's home in Chattanooga and drove up the switchback road they call "the W." I was so glad that I was nearing the end of a long and challenging day of travel. The falling rain, combined with the amount of water spraying up from the freeway, made the visibility poor. Tired and anxious to reach my destination, I didn't really want to stop at the grocery store, but I needed to pick up a few treats for my granddaughter. Thankfully, I found a parking spot near the door and was able to make it in the store without getting drenched. I tried to quickly find the items I was looking for in the unfamiliar store and get in line. As I reached the checkout lane, the clerk asked, "How are you?"

"I am great, thank you. How are you?"

Her head turned suddenly, and she looked at me with surprise and asked, "Really? Even when it has been such an awful, rainy day? How can you be so great on a day like today?" I said a quick, silent prayer. I responded that I had just arrived from out of town and was excited about visiting my new grandbaby, my daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. I asked her if she was having a difficult day. As she gave me my receipt, she explained she was having a difficult year, and

that a lot of hard things had happened. I asked her for her name and told her that I would be praying for her. She told me her name was Penny. I was already holding up the line when I received a phone call from my daughter Hannah to see if I had already left the store. I hadn't. She then asked if I would please pick up some cooking oil. We all laughed, and I headed back to the aisles.

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

The Bible teaches that the joy of the Lord is to be our strength (Nehemiah 8:10), and that we are to rejoice in the Lord always (Philippians 4:4). I knew painfully well that His joy hadn't been my strength in those difficult times. The realization was harsh and disturbing. I had gone through many trials before and found myself able to walk forward in joy and know His comfort, but that had not been the case in this most recent trial. At the time, I was reeling from the shock of my response, and I desperately longed to be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season, whose leaves did not wither (Psalm 1:3). But that just wasn't the case. I was forced to reexamine my heart, my thoughts, my priorities, and my affections. What was it that I held so dear? I thought I knew my Savior's love for me. I thought He was my all in all. But I was finding out He wasn't. We think we understand the affections of our hearts, but only the Lord truly knows. In the midst of the trial, I felt as though my life was flashing before me. I was straining

to see what I truly stood upon. What was I holding near and dear in my heart? Where did I place my trust? I discovered there were things hidden in my heart—fear, doubt, and hurt—and I was unaware of them. Oh, what pain they caused.

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

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

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts all of us who know God and who are called by Him to get our priorities right, to prepare our minds for action, and to set our hope fully on Jesus (1 Peter 1:13). Since He has redeemed, rescued, and given us a new hope, we need to be ready to serve the Lord and to focus! *“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’”* (1 Peter 1:13-16). This is what Peter says we are to strive for, yet we find ourselves holding on to or in some cases, running after worthless things. Pulled by our human emotions and desires,

discouraged by our weaknesses, and tainted by sin, many of us are easily distracted and diverted away from the pursuit of holiness. On the other hand, some of us may find ourselves caught up in getting all the externals right. Oh, yes, we have been redeemed, bought by the blood of Christ, but we must overcome our wily flesh that sin has infected, by the power of the Holy Spirit. I say “wily” because our flesh is wily, although some of us may not appear as wily as others.

The Lord has called us to work to overcome our remaining sin, trusting in the power He has given us in the Holy Spirit and the grace and forgiveness given to us through Christ, because we are not able to do this in our own strength. This work will be a battle. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other . . . ”* (Galatians 5:17). In every believer’s heart, there is a constant struggle between the old man and the new. We can be blind to the old man that so fiercely resists the truth as he creeps up from behind, seeking to rule and reign. Listen to John Owen’s perspective:

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

We need to ask God to give us eyes to see our sinful ways so that we are able to get to the root of them and so that we can recognize our sin and overcome it. Paul instructs and informs us in Ephesians 4:21-24 that *“you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* We want to turn toward God, draw near to Him, and have Him search our hearts.

We want to be rooted and established in Christ, filled with Christ, and overflowing with Christ—and not ourselves! If we want to walk in the Spirit and not live out the desires of the flesh, we have work to do. *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:12-13). We must be about the work the Lord has called us to do, the working out of our salvation. Paul further says that since we have put off the old woman, we are to now put away our old ways.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:25-28)

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

So, this is what we're going to be doing over the next several weeks: getting to the root of our sin by allowing the Lord to search us and reveal to us what lies deep in our hearts. Psalm 139:23-24 says, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* Then, by His grace, as we take up our cross, die to self, and confess and repent of our sins, a powerful, life-changing work will be accomplished in us. We will impact generations.

Over the coming weeks, please remember that getting to the root of your sins is a lifelong process. When we are in Christ, the Father sees us through Him. We are precious in His sight, and He adores us with an love that is hard to comprehend. Will you make it your goal to choose to believe that He loves you right where you are—imperfect, sinful, but distinctly His? He loves you, not because of your performance, but because of your position in Christ. Be patient and allow Him to lead and do His work, His way. There are times when the Lord will deliver us from strongholds of sin immediately. However, much of the time, God works slowly and deliberately. His desire is to have a close, intimate relationship with us, and he achieves this by making us dependent upon Him. He is looking for your trust and obedience, not your immediate and instantaneous perfection.

His Son is perfect and has already fulfilled all of the requirements of the law for you. Because the Lord is at work, we are able to work out our salvation. Christ is your righteousness and is working in and through you. It is all part of His wise and more than wonderful plan. He is building a new kingdom in your heart. Breaking down the old and replacing it with the new is only possible through the mercy, power, and grace of God. It involves crying out to the Lord and listening to Him. We want to learn to ask God for all we need. Look to Him and plead. Listen to King Solomon's request in the face of a huge task and hear God's response. Take it to heart:

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father . . . At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your

people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding² to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” (1 Kings 3:3-14)

Respond to the Lord’s work in your life and ask Him to give you wisdom as He gave it to Solomon. As you begin this process and as the Lord reveals your sin, you may feel more than a little overwhelmed by the sense of your unholiness. Do not be discouraged; although it may feel awful, it is a good thing. It is a wonderful and beautiful work you are doing and one that will impact generations to come. Each time you see your sin, remember to look to Jesus, your Savior and your Lord, hide yourself in Him, and put all your hope in Christ and not in self.

Remember, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). When you feel particularly discouraged and want to give up, run into the arms of your Savior and Lord. *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe”* (Proverbs 18:10). Practice fixing your eyes upon Him, putting your trust in Him and in His mercy and grace. He loves you and loved you while you were yet a sinner. If you have surrendered your life to Him, it is important to remember your position in Him. You are no longer who you once were; you now are in Christ. Walk forward in Him. This endeavor is well worth your effort because a great harvest lies ahead.

Taking the Truth to Heart

Day One
Conclusion

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting!

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

This week and every week during this portion of your study, we are going to pray the above Scripture and make it the cry of our hearts. Notice that the psalmist is asking God to search his heart. And he not only asks Him to search his heart, but he bravely also asks God to try him! He is asking the Lord to bring trials and tests into his life to reveal the reality of his heart.

This is not our earthly mindset. We so desperately hope the Lord won't bring trials into our lives and often feel that if He really loved us He would protect us from them, yet our faith is strengthened through them. Not only does the Lord refine and strengthen our faith through trials, but, as we will learn so clearly in this study, the Lord brings the hidden things of our hearts to light through trials—not only the good and the bad, but also the most praiseworthy. Listen to 1 Peter 1:6-7: *“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Trials are a powerful tool of the Lord, particularly when we truly believe He is working all things together for good and when we draw near to Him by grace through faith.

In the excerpt from Psalm 139, David asks the Lord to probe deep into his heart. David was well-acquainted with trials, yet he asked to be tested because he desired to have a heart like God's. David, who was once a shepherd boy and then anointed king by God, is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. Because of David's pursuit after God, it is helpful to carefully observe his psalms. We can learn so much about how to have an intimate and real relationship with God. In his psalms we are also able to observe David's understanding of God, his response to God and His Word, and his relationship with God.

We will have an opportunity to learn from David and the other psalmists during this study. For years I longed for a mentor, someone who would teach me how to walk with God and have an intimate relationship with Him. Surprisingly, the Lord didn't bring a living person into my life, but led me to sit under David, a man who lived thousands of years ago. It was in his psalms that I learned more about God and about how my heart should respond to Him. I resolved to pray the Scriptures at every opportunity, to listen to David and learn from him, and to not be afraid.

Step One

Turn in your Bible to Psalm 139. Read it through, observing God's love, knowledge, and care for you. Then take a few minutes to ask the Lord to search you and to test you today and throughout the week to reveal any ungodly way in you and in your heart. Ultimately we know the Lord is the Shepherd of our hearts. He loves you. He is a tender, loving, trustworthy Shepherd. Remember the gospel and speak the truth to your heart. (View page 16 of the Appendix.) Please take a couple of minutes now to turn to the Appendix and briefly review the material there. These pages will be referenced frequently throughout the study to give you examples and additional information.

Step Two

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

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

Why is taking the truth to heart important? Why do we take the time to observe ourselves and think through these things? Because the Bible tells us we are to be transformed. And how are we to accomplish this? By the renewing of our hearts and minds. The apostle Paul wrote,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2).

We are exhorted not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing we may discern God's will. A sixteenth century theologian wrote about this passage:

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

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

Again, we read that we are the Lord's: let us then live and die for him. We are the Lord's: let his will and wisdom govern all we do.

We are the Lord's: let every part of our lives be directed to him as to their sole end. How privileged is the man who, knowing that he is not his own, denies his reason lordship and dominion over him and surrenders it instead to God! For just as there is no greater curse than self-satisfaction, which leads to ruin and destruction, so also the only haven of salvation is to cease to be wise in oneself, and to want nothing on one's own account, but simply to follow the Lord.

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

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

As you end your study today, reread the hymn at the end of the Welcome (p. viii) and then close in prayer using the powerful and beautiful prayer on the page before it (p. vii).

Day Two



Blessed Is the Woman Who . . .

Psalm 1:1-3 *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 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.*

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

Taking the Truth to Heart

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

Day Three



The Lord Is Your Shepherd

Psalm 23:1-4 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 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.*

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

Taking the Truth to Heart

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

Day Four



My Soul Shall Abide in Well-Being

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

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

Taking the Truth to Heart

We ascend the hill of the Lord by faith. No one is qualified to do that; we all fall short. But praise be to God, for He has made a way where there was no way—by faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:20-24). Jesus is the only one who perfectly fulfills the description of the person in Psalm 24. However, when Jesus saves us, He makes us more and more like Himself and gives us His Holy Spirit, but we have a role to play. If we want to be holy as He is holy, we have work to do. As we, by His grace, put off the old woman and put away our old ways, the Holy Spirit will move. Review the instructions from Day One. Remember to fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Day Five



O Lord, Teach Me Your Ways

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

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

Taking the Truth to Heart

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

Day Six



Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

Lesson One begins the Taking the Truth to Heart process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We have been instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits, sinful actions and/or words, on the tree located on the opposite page. The small group time in class will end each week with the Taking the Truth to Heart time. Each person will be asked to vulnerably and transparently share the sinful fruit from their trees, again being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

James 5:16 says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”* Remember, we are observing the outer man so that we can better understand the inner man. Ask God for wisdom, discernment, and understanding—for eyes to see your behaviors and ears to hear your words in such a way that you are able to understand the remaining sin in your heart. Praise God for His great mercy and take in the amazing grace of His gospel. Keep your eyes on your Savior, the author and perfecter of your faith.

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

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Lesson One - Sinful Fruit Only



Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

(Complete in your small group.)

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit



Heart of a Woman

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY

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

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

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