



Memory Passage

Colossians 3:5-17

LESSON ONE: COLOSSIANS 3:5-6

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

LESSON TWO: COLOSSIANS 3:7-8

7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

LESSON THREE: COLOSSIANS 3:9-10

9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

LESSON FOUR: COLOSSIANS 3:11

11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

LESSON FIVE: COLOSSIANS 3:12-13

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

LESSON SIX: COLOSSIANS 3:14

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

LESSON SEVEN: COLOSSIANS 3:15

15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

LESSON EIGHT: COLOSSIANS 3:16-17

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



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.

Proverbs 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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APPENDIX

Sample Trees of Unrighteousness and Righteousness, Tools, Endnotes

A1

BONUS SECTION

Additional Tree and Blank Pages For Lecture Notes

B1

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

An important note about our lecture audios and videos

The wonderful benefit of a Thistlebend discipleship Bible study is the structured flexibility. Thistlebend recognizes that churches and individuals have different needs. While it is not necessary to incorporate the teaching audio or video as part of the weekly lesson, it is a vital tool and important part of the Thistlebend curriculum. The audio or video lecture synthesizes the weekly content to provide a summary, application points, and new scriptural insights.

Many women testify how the Lord uses Laurie's teaching to impact their hearts, know Christ more deeply, and fully follow Him. The audio or video lectures provide witness to her vulnerability, zealous passion for God's Word, and the Gospel. As iron sharpens iron, Laurie exhorts women to immerse themselves into the Word of God, renew their minds, and be transformed like Christ. Therefore Thistlebend, strongly recommends incorporating the audio or video teaching into the weekly lesson.



Welcome to a Thistlebend Discipleship Study

*What is more important than our
relationship with the Lord?*

Thistlebend studies are designed for women who want to know Jesus more fully, love Him more deeply, and follow Him more closely. To use Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner's words, "*The whole aim of Thistlebend: to assist women to love Christ in the practical, nitty-gritty of everyday life.*" Therefore, the nature of the approach and the type of questions Thistlebend studies ask may differ from other Bible studies on the same subject. Women who participate in Thistlebend studies often share they experience authentic growth and spiritual intimacy. Real and lasting heart transformation takes place by God's grace. Biblical disciplines are integrated into every Thistlebend lesson and daily women are asked to "Take the Truth to Heart and Bring It to Life." These practices train women to *believe* God's Word in their hearts, *apply* it in their thinking, and *live it out* in their lives. Our deepest desire is to see women cultivate hearts of righteousness, grow in their love for God and others, be equipped to overcome sin, walk by grace, live in the joy of the Lord, and glorify Him.

Many blessings in Christ,

A handwritten signature in a cursive script that reads "Laurie".

Laurie and the Thistlebend Team

Are you ready for a fresh encounter with the Lord in His Word?

Find a quiet cozy corner to meet with God in His Word, pour yourself a cup of coffee, light a candle, and open your Bible. This workbook is your traveling companion on an exciting journey with the Lord. There is plenty of room to journal your thoughts and prayers, lecture note space for notes during each week's teaching session, and a spiral binding for ease of use. If you need anything or have any questions please email us at info@thistlebend.org.

Organization of the Workbook

- Complete one lesson each week.
- Each lesson contains six days of homework.
- A Scripture Memory Passage is located on the first page of the study for those who desire to practice this discipline. Prompts are given throughout each lesson as a reminder to practice the Memory Passage.

Day One

- Day One in each lesson begins with a devotional to provide direction for the week while preparing your heart and mind to receive the Lord's teaching throughout the remainder of the lesson.

Day Two

- On this day you will be introduced to the Taking the Truth to Heart steps for this particular lesson/week. You will be guided step by step each day 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 week (see Exhibit C, page vii).

Days Three-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 are often asked to copy Scripture word for word even when it is printed in your Bible or on the page. In our busy and task-oriented world, we tend to spend so little time really pondering or meditating on what God has to say in the Bible. Writing out Scripture helps you slow down and think about what you are reading so it will sink deep into your heart. Our goal is not to merely increase in knowledge but to have the Lord and His Word shape our hearts and minds.

- Each day you are prompted to work through the Taking the Truth to Heart process.
- *Note:* While you are working through your daily homework you may have questions. There is an opportunity to discuss homework when your small group meets. However, Thistlebend encourages you to reach out to your Abigail or small group leader any time during the week for help. If you are not in a group, feel free to ask questions 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 revealed to you during the week.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” section (see Exhibit D, page vii) at the end of the lesson is completed by reviewing the tree from Day Two (see Exhibit C, page vii) and filling in the information requested.
- This section needs to be completed before you come to class (even if you did not complete the homework from other days). Be prepared to share your answers with your Taking the Truth to Heart group.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart Guide”(see Exhibit E, page vii) is on the last page of each lesson. This guide is used during the small group time to write out what each person shares so you can be praying for each other. Leave the guide blank until class time.

Daily Homework Time Options

- Choose the amount of time appropriate for your walk with the Lord. We encourage you to seek Him and His guidance as you make this choice.

Option 1: 15-20 minutes

Option 2: 20-30 minutes

Option 3: 30-45 minutes

Option 4: Complete the lesson regardless of the time it takes.

Important Note: Keep in mind, you may not be able to complete the day’s homework in your allotted time choice. When you begin your homework the following day, begin with the next day’s homework. Do not try to finish the previous day’s work. Your goal is to set a pattern of consistent Bible study and to trust the Lord with what is left undone. Regardless, make sure you leave enough time to complete the first two pages of the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section on Day Six.

Church and Neighborhood Small Group

Suggested Study Schedule

(Online study schedule is in the following section)

Weekly Gatherings:

Large Group Discipleship Time

Small Group Discipleship Time

Taking the Truth to Heart Group Time

Large Group Discipleship Time

- Begin class with praise and prayer. Then open with a teaching time by the group leader or watch Laurie's teaching video for the corresponding week.
- Suggested Weekly Order:
 - The Week One Class is an introduction to the study which includes: a welcome, fellowship, introduction teaching, small group discussion of teaching time and icebreakers.
 - Each participant begins in the Welcome section in the workbook the following day.
 - The Week Two Class (and following) includes a teaching lecture on the lesson that was just completed and a discussion of the lesson in the small groups.
 - Each participant begins the next lesson in their workbook the following day.
(Continue to follow this pattern)

Small Group Discipleship Time

- Following the teaching time, participants move to small groups. The small group leader begins by reading the prayer at the beginning of the Discussion Questions. The group then discusses how the Lord used the teaching lecture to speak to their hearts.
- Next, the small group leader discusses the week's homework. First, the main point of the lesson is read, and then questions are asked to review each day of the lesson.
- Finally, group members are asked to fill out a Care Card (see Exhibit A on page vii) so the leader can pray for them and assist them in areas where they may need help.
- The small group concludes by reciting in unison the Scripture memory verse(s) for that lesson.

Taking the Truth to Heart Group Time

- After discussing the teaching lecture and homework, group members divide into even smaller groups (3-4 women). This may vary depending on the size of the initial group.
- Each group member will have an opportunity to share from their completed “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” page, previously 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. Holding to a strict time limit helps the focus remain on God and His Word. The purpose of this time is not for women to “fix” one another, but to learn to confess their sin to one another while fixing 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 Guide” (see Exhibit E, page vii). This allows group members to pray specifically for one another throughout the week.
- Group members are encouraged to remember God’s love through the gospel as they share transparently.
- If you have any questions about these steps, please contact your group leader as soon as possible. She will be happy to help you with any questions you may have.

What to Bring

- Bible
- Workbook
- Pen

Online Participants

Suggested Study Schedule

Weekly Study:

Audio or Video Time

Daily Study in the Workbook

Taking the Truth to Heart Time

Begin with Teaching Video/Audio (available online)

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

Review Discussion Questions (available online)

- Pray, reflect on, note how the Lord spoke to you through the teaching.
- Read the main point of the lesson and answer the Discussion Questions.

Daily Study in the Workbook

- Begin your workbook homework with Lesson One the day after you watch, or listen to, the teaching lecture.
- There are six days of homework in each lesson.
- Begin the homework each week after you watch, or listen to, the teaching lecture.

Taking the Truth to Heart

- At the end of each lesson, on Day Six, complete your “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Exhibit D, page vii).
- Share your Taking the Truth to Heart pages with your online group leader by taking a photo of your pages. Share the pages via email or text. The purpose of this time is to enable women 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.

STUDY DOCUMENTS

These documents and more are available on the Thistlebend app (Begin Here) and website (Resources).

Exhibit A



Care Card

Name & Cell _____

Date & Lesson Title: _____

Thistlebend Homework

_____ I completed the homework I committed to do each day
 _____ I only completed _____ days of homework

The reason I did not fully complete my homework is: _____

Personal Spiritual Prayer Request:

Prayer Requests for Family & Friends:

Questions or Concerns:

Feedback

1. What was most helpful to you personally about the lecture?
2. Was there anything that was confusing or that you did not understand?
3. What was most helpful to you about the homework?
4. Was there anything that was confusing or that you did not understand?

Exhibit C

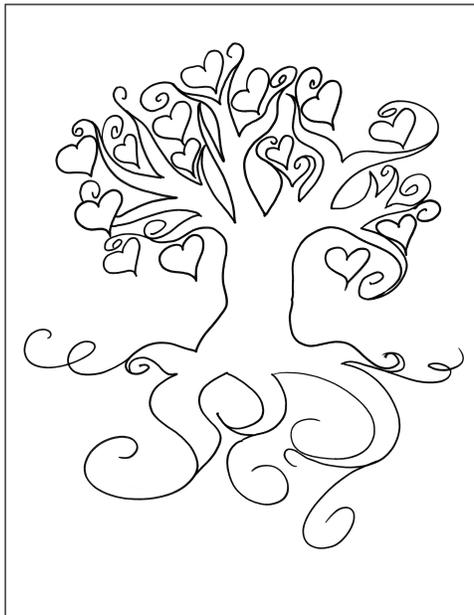


Exhibit D (Page one of two)



Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment

Our Affirmation

Christ first loved us and we want to follow Him, trust His will for our lives, and no longer live for self in the flesh.

We want to love the Lord and others as He commands in His Word. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the great and first commandment. "And a second is like it: Thou shalt love your neighbor as yourself" (Mat. 22:37-39).

Having witnessed the destructive power of sin in our own hearts and lives, we desire to learn how to repent of our sin and walk forward through grace in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We desire to lay down our pride and humbly admit we do not have it together. We desire the support of the body of Christ and are willing to allow others to speak truth into our lives because of blind spots we cannot see.

We believe Jesus calls us to pick up our cross, follow Him, and we desire practical help to understand how this is manifested in our lives.

Discipleship Study Goal and Focus:

Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength
 Love our neighbor as ourselves
 Live the gospel by grace through faith
 Take the Truth to heart and bring it to life
 Grow in our understanding of true discipleship
 Love for Christ because He died for us

Practically and Earnestly Pursue:

The Spirit of obedience
 Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
 Picking up our cross and denying self
 Offering ourselves as a living sacrifice
 Living as members of one body
 Faithful obedience to God's Word
 Speaking the Truth in Love
 Forgetting as we have been forgiven

Exhibit D (See Day Six of Lesson One)

.....

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 3:16 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 faith 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.

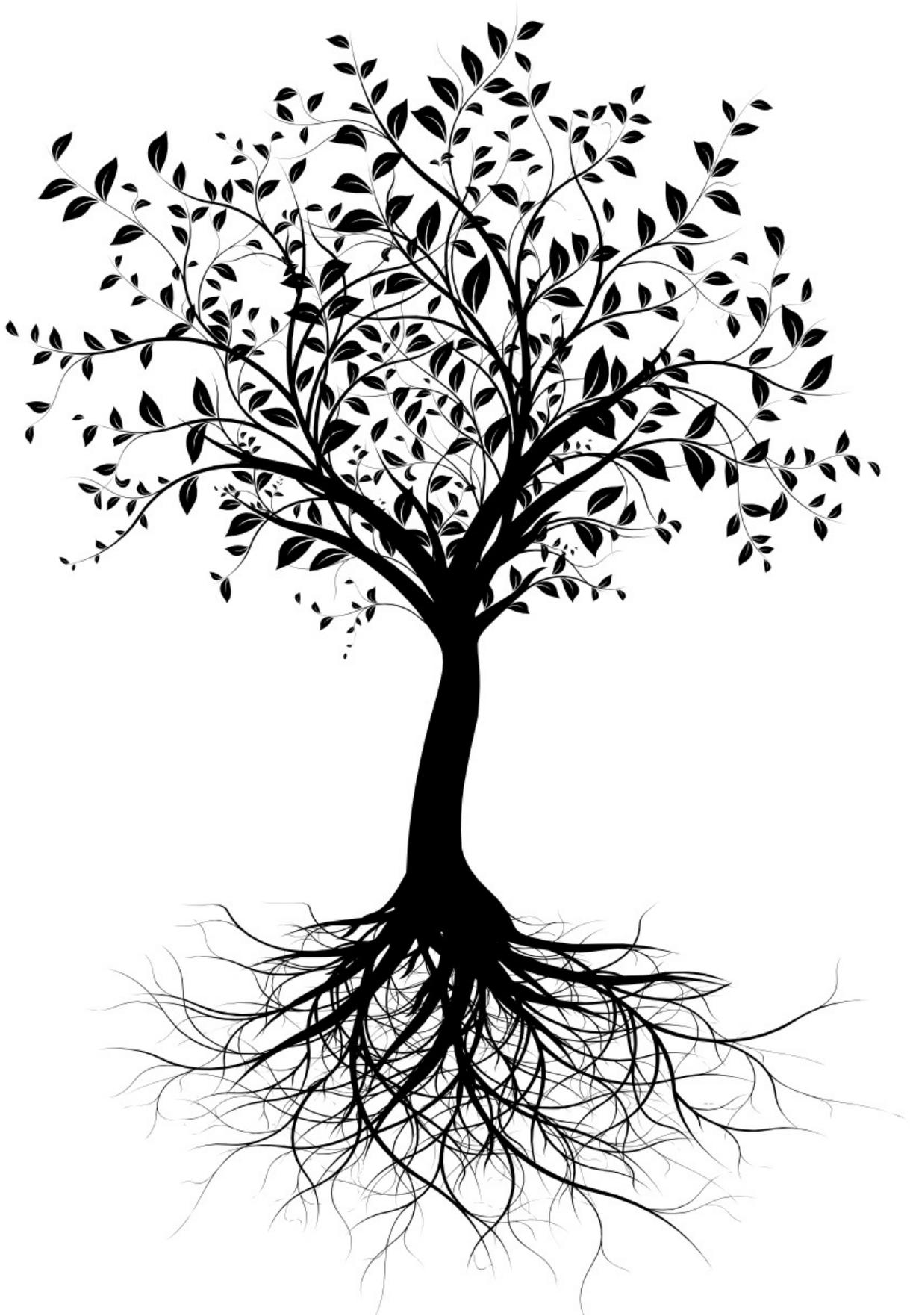
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Exhibit E (See Day Six of Lesson One)

.....

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

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit



Day One

Planted by Streams
of Water

As I sit high atop Signal Mountain near Chattanooga, 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, however, insists there must be at least a few clouds to break up the expanse of blue! Without a doubt, the endless blue sky is my favorite. Today, there is low humidity, and I 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 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 did not really want to stop at the grocery store, but I needed to pick up a few treats for my granddaughter. Thankfully, there was a parking spot near the door, and I was able to make it into the store without getting drenched. I found the items I was looking for in the unfamiliar store and got in the checkout line. As I reached the counter, the clerk asked, "How are you?"

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

Her head turned suddenly, and she looked at me with surprise saying, "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 just arrived from out of town and I was excited about visiting our new grandbaby, our daughter and her husband, 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 pray 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, asking if I would please pick up some cooking oil if I had not already left the store. 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 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 how His presence in my life and in my heart was giving me joy, but I hesitated as I gathered my thoughts. I realized that if I was not 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 as a woman who taught Bible studies, I knew some rough times not too long ago, when I was not filled with joy. During that time, I came to grips with the fact 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 (Neh. 8:10), and we are to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4). I knew painfully well that His joy had not been my strength during those difficult times. The realization was harsh and disturbing. I went through many trials before and found myself able to walk forward in joy and know His comfort, but this was not the case in my most recent trial. At the time, I desperately longed to be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in season, whose leaves did not wither (Ps. 1:3). However, that was not my response. I was forced to re-examine my heart, thoughts, priorities, and 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. I was finding out He was not. I thought I understood the affections of my heart, but only the Lord truly knew. 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—all of which I was blind to. Oh, what pain these hidden things caused.

I thought through how I might share all of this with Penny. As I found the oil and made my way back to her register, I prayed and asked the Lord to lead me

to effectively reach out to her. As I paid for my item, I shared with Penny how I encountered some pretty tough times recently as well, and I told her that I would pray for her. I planned to touch base with Penny before I left Signal Mountain.

If we are in Christ, He forever changes our hearts, giving us new hearts that know joy even in the most difficult circumstances. He gives us the desire for righteousness, holiness, and truth. Jesus rescued us, 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 also gives us the power to overcome sin and the hope of living in heaven one day without the presence of sin. God gives us the Holy Spirit—God Himself—and the Father’s inheritance. As if that is not enough, Jesus gives us access to the throne room of God, always and forever, to ask for and bring all things before Him. Paul writes, “*How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways*” (Rom. 11:33). May we do everything we can 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, prepare our minds for action, and set our hope fully on Jesus (1 Pet. 1:13). Since He redeems, rescues, and gives us a new hope, we must be ready to serve the Lord, “*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. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’*” (1 Pet. 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, desires, discouraging weaknesses, and tainted 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 are redeemed, bought by the blood of Christ, but we must overcome our wily flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. I say “wily” because our flesh is beguiling and crafty, although some of us may not appear as wily as others.

The Lord calls us to overcome our remaining sin. Because we are not able to overcome sin in our own strength, we must trust in the power, grace, and forgiveness He gives us in the Spirit. This work is a battle. Paul instructs us,

“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 . . . ” (Gal. 5:17). In every believer’s heart, there is a constant struggle between the sinful flesh and the Spirit. We are often blind to the sinful flesh as it fiercely resists the truth as Satan 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 must ask God to give us eyes to see our sinful ways, to recognize sin, identify the root 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, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 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 ask Him to search our hearts.

We desire to be rooted, established, filled, and overflowing with Christ—not ourselves. If we desire to walk in the Spirit and not live out the desires of the flesh, we have work to do. Remember, *“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).

As the Lord has called us to do, we must be about His work, the working out of our salvation. Paul further says that since we have put off the old self, we now must put off 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. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 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. (Eph. 4:25-28)

Like weeds in a garden, if we neglect to dig up the roots of sin in our hearts and put them to death, the sin will overtake our hearts and choke the life out of us. The fleshly roots of our hearts wrap themselves around and cling to the most insidious, distasteful, and worthless things, allowing 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 are then rooted and established in Love Himself.

This is what we are learning 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! 24 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, confess, and repent of our sins, God will accomplish a powerful, life-changing work in us.

Over the coming weeks, please remember that getting to the root of your sins is a lifelong process. When we are in Christ, the Father sees us through Him. We are precious in His sight, and He adores us with a love 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? God 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 immediately delivers us from the strongholds of sin. However, much of the time, God works slowly and deliberately. His desire is to have a close, intimate relationship with us. He achieves this intimacy by making us dependent upon Him. The Father is looking for your trust and obedience, not your immediate and instantaneous perfection. His Son is perfect and has fulfilled all of the requirements of the law for you. Christ is your righteousness and because He is at work

in you, you are able to work out your salvation. It is all part of our heavenly Father's wise and wonderful plan. He is building a new kingdom in your heart and invites you into this magnificent transformation. Breaking down the old and replacing it with the new is only possible through Him. We must humbly ask Him for His mercy, wisdom, and grace. Listen to King Solomon's request in the face of a huge task, hear God's response, and take it to heart:

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. 4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." 6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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?" 10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12 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. 13 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. 14 And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments as your David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (1 Kgs. 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 the Lord reveals your sin, you may feel more than a little overwhelmed by the sense of your unholiness. Do not be discouraged; although the revelation of sin may feel awful, it is a good thing. It is a wonderful and beautiful work you are doing, and the impact is for generations to come. Each time you see your sin, remember to look to Jesus and not in yourself. See Him as your Savior and your Lord, hide yourself in Him, and put all your hope in Christ.

Remember, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Remember your salvation and God's great love for you. He loves you and loved you while you were still a sinner. If you surrendered your life to Him, it is important to remember your position in Him. You are no longer who you once were; you are now in Christ. Happy is the one who has been rescued, revived, and redeemed. You are free from the burden of sin and condemnation. Listen to the psalmist, "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit*" (Ps. 32:1-2). When you feel particularly discouraged and want to give up, run into the arms of your Savior and Lord. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that "*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe*" (Pro. 18:10). Practice fixing your eyes upon Him by putting your trust in Him, His mercy, and grace. Walk forward in Him. This endeavor is well worth your effort because a great harvest lies ahead. As you end your study today, close in prayer and praise using the prayer and song lyrics on the following pages.

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 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 power, we still wrestle daily with the indwelling presence of sin. It affects not just what we do and say, but how we think, our motives, and 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 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.²

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.

Day Two



Blessed One

Read Psalm 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

*2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

*3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away,
through my groaning all day long.*

*4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*

*5 I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

*6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.*

*7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah*

*8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

*9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*

*10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.*

*11 Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Note your observations of Psalm 32 below.

Listen to the encouragement from the psalmist. Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven and their sins are covered. God, in His great love, mercy, and grace, makes provision for our sin through His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life, died in our place, and rose from the dead. He takes all of our sin upon Himself, paid the penalty we owed, and bore the deserving wrath of God. Every morning when we awake we must lift our hearts to the Lord and be filled with deep gratitude for His extraordinary love for us through our salvation. Our burden of sin and guilt is lifted, and the bondage of sin is broken. We may not always feel like rejoicing. In fact, we may feel overwhelmed by our sin and weaknesses, but we can learn from this psalm. We must speak the truth of the gospel to our hearts, choose to believe, and be glad.

David is the psalmist who wrote this psalm. Once a shepherd boy and also a king anointed by God, David is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. Because of David's whole hearted pursuit after God, it is helpful to carefully observe his psalms. 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. In this study we will have an opportunity to learn from David, the other psalmists, and how to enter into an intimate relationship with the Lord.

For years, I longed for a mentor, someone to teach me how to walk with God and to have an intimate relationship with Him. Surprisingly, at that time the Lord did not bring a living person into my life, but led me to sit under David who lived thousands of years ago. It was through David that I learned how to have an intimate relationship with God and about how my heart should respond to Him. I resolved to pray the Scriptures at every opportunity, listen, learn, and to not be afraid.

Let us use Psalm 32 as a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for God's loving provision for us in Christ. Write your prayer below.

Before proceeding, read Psalm 139 in your Bible. This passage is helpful and sets the context for why and how to use the Taking the Truth to Heart method. Read the following passage. Observe God's love, knowledge, and care for you. Write your observations below.

Psalm 139

Read verses 23 and 24 again. David asked 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. We must follow David's example and ask the Lord to search our hearts. John Calvin stated, "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."⁴

This week and every week during this portion of your study, we are going to pray Psalm 139:23-24 and make it the cry of our hearts. Notice that the psalmist is asking God to search his heart. David not only asks God to search his heart, but he bravely 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.

Why would we ever want the Lord to bring about a trial or a test? Why is this so important? Because we want to be holy. We no longer want to be controlled by our sinful flesh; we want to be Spirit filled. We take the time to observe ourselves and think through these things. The Bible tells us we are to be transformed. How do we to accomplish transformation? We must renew our hearts and minds by taking the truth to heart so that it transforms us and makes us more like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, *“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. 2 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”* (Rom. 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. 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, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Turn to the following page and begin working through the Taking the Truth to Heart steps.

Taking the Truth to Heart

Psalm 139:23-24

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

David asked 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. Every week during this study, we are going to follow David's example and pray Psalm 139:23-24 to make it the cry of our hearts.

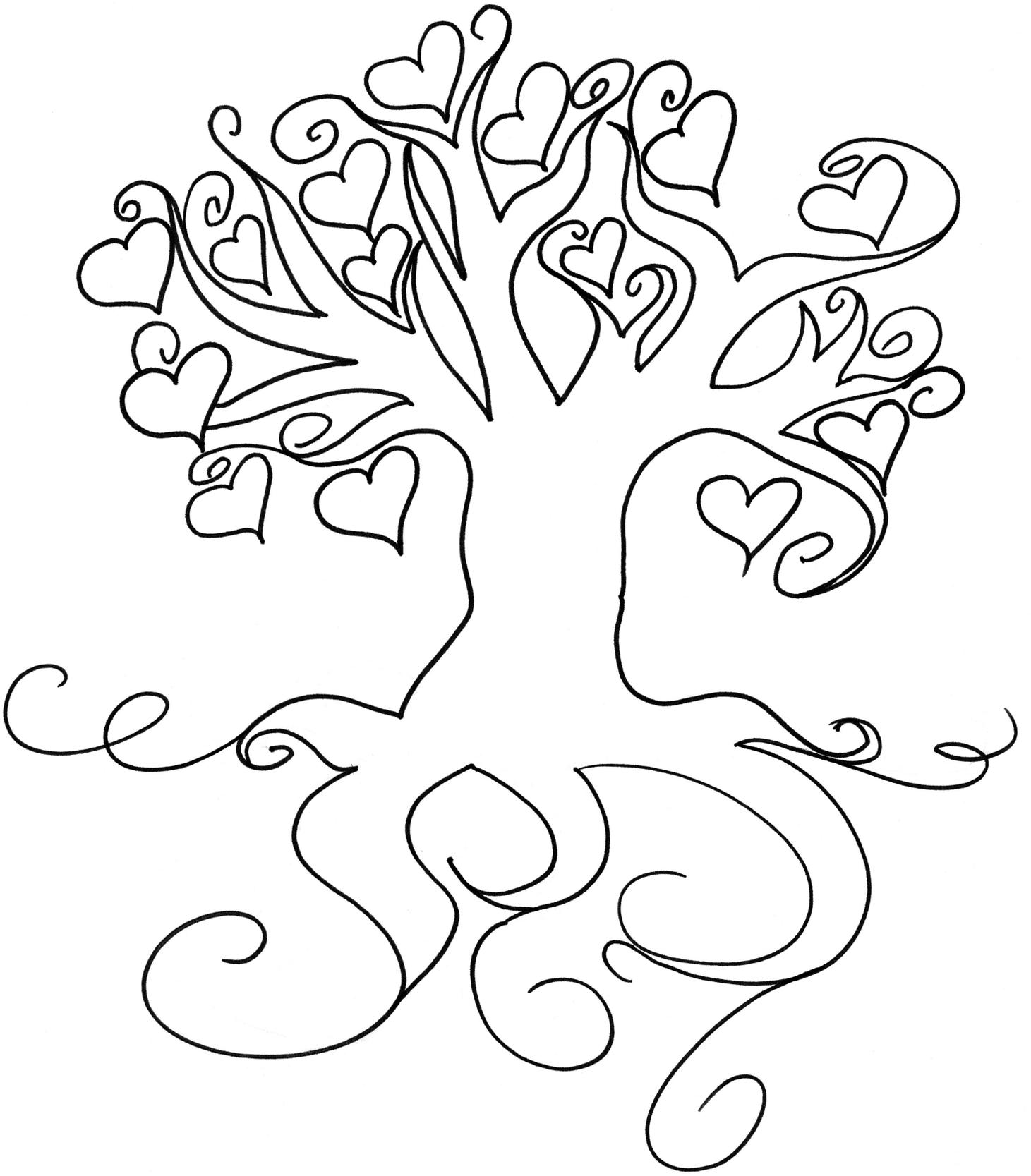
Before we begin, turn to pages 16-18 of the Appendix and read through the Scriptures. After you finish, take a moment to look at the sample trees in the Appendix. These pages are referenced frequently throughout the study to give you examples and additional information.

Step One

Read Psalm 139:23-24. Ask the Lord to search you and test you today and throughout the week to reveal any ungodly way in you. The Lord is the tender, loving, and trustworthy Shepherd of our hearts.

Step Two

Ask the Lord to help you observe your actions and your words i.e., your fruit. Today and each day this week, fill in the hearts (the fruit) of the tree on the opposite page with any ungodly actions and words you observe (see p. A4). At this point do not write down your thoughts or your feelings (we will get to those later). Strictly focus on your outward, observable behaviors and spoken words (see pp. A5-A7). On class day, during your small group "Taking the Truth to Heart" time, each person is 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."*



Day Three



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 1 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? How does this look 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 by walking with God, standing in the Word, and sitting at His feet.

Taking the Truth to Heart

What sins has the Lord brought to your attention so far this week? Write out your answers on the following page. Do not be afraid. Bring the revealed sin before Him for forgiveness. Follow the instructions from the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section from Day Two and refer to the examples in the Appendix. Take a moment to fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Day Four



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. Open your Bible and read through the entire Psalm 23. As we walk through the next several weeks, keep this precious psalm in mind. Take a few moments to write on the facing page what this psalm says about your loving and caring Shepherd. As you work through difficult things in the coming weeks, believe these truths hidden in your heart. 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 the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section. Lastly, 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? Write out your answers on the following page. Open your Bible and read through the rest of the beautiful and encouraging Psalm 25. Make a list on the facing page of what you learned 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 you do your part of asking God to search your heart, agree with God about your sin and confess it to Him. God will do the work that only He can do as He transforms your heart. He will teach you His ways and His paths. Turn again to the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section 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

Day Two began the “Taking the Truth to Heart” process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We were instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits, sinful actions, and/or words, on the tree. The small group time in class ends each week with the “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” pages. Each person is 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. Ask Him 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. _____

Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

(Complete in your small group.)

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit