



Jesus, I Need You

Focus Scripture: Matthew 1-7

by Laurie Aker

Contributing Editor

SCOTT KACZOROWSKI

M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctrinal Editor

ED DUNNINGTON

PhD, Covenant Theological Seminary

A Thistlebend Discipleship Study



Editors:

Julie Gibson

Anna Koke

Amy Page

A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

Jesus, I Need You

Copyright © 2022, 2019, 2018, 2014, 2010, 2009 by Laurie Aker

2006 (At His Feet)

Thistlebend Cottage Press

2212 Lakeland Road

Louisville, Kentucky 40223

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scripture quotations identified from THE MESSAGE are taken from THE MESSAGE: THE BIBLE IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH, Copyright© 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission, NavPress Publishing Group.

Printed in the United States of America.

THISTLEBEND MINISTRIES

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 23524, Louisville, KY 40223

Main Office: 11405 Park Road Suite 201 Anchorage KY 40223

502-216-4599

www.thistlebend.org

info@thistlebend.org

Thistlebend Ministries is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

This study and its corresponding resources are made possible through the generous contributions of the Friends of Thistlebend and people like you.



Table of Contents

WELCOME:	i
LESSON ONE: Jesus, I Need You	1
LESSON TWO: A Voice in the Wilderness	21
LESSON THREE: Journey to the Jordan	41
LESSON FOUR: Into the Desert	61
LESSON FIVE: The Light Dawns	85
LESSON SIX: On the Mount	107
LESSON SEVEN: Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit	127
LESSON EIGHT: Blessed Are Those Who Hunger	149
LESSON NINE: Blessed Are the Persecuted	171
LESSON TEN: A City on a Hill	193
APPENDIX:	A1
Lecture Notes	A3
Endnotes	A25
Audio/Video Passwords	A28

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

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 and video lectures provide witness to her vulnerability and encourage a 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 to become more like Christ. Therefore, Thistlebend strongly recommends incorporating the video or 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. In 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. Nevertheless, 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. We integrate Biblical disciplines into every Thistlebend daily lesson where we ask women 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 cursive script that reads "Laurie".

Laurie and the Thistlebend Team

Are you ready for a fresh encounter with the Lord and 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 of 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.

Days Two through Five

- On Days Two through Five, you will 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, we will ask you 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 to slow down and process what you are reading so it will sink deep into your heart. We aim to help you increase your knowledge and have the Lord and His Word shape our hearts and minds.
- Each day, you will be prompted to work through the "Taking the Truth to Heart" process.
- *Note:* You may have questions while 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 contact your Abigail or your 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 has revealed to you during the week.
- The “Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life” section (see Exhibit C, page vii) is completed by reviewing the “Taking the Truth to Heart” boxes from days Two through Five and completing the requested information. You must complete this section 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 D, page vii) is on the last page of each lesson. We will use this guide 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, start with the next day’s lesson. Do not try to finish the previous day’s work. Your goal is to set a consistent Bible study pattern and trust the Lord with what is left undone. Regardless, ensure you leave enough time to complete the first two pages of the “Taking the Truth to Heart” section on Day Six.

Please view the video lectures or listen to the audio that accompany each weekly lesson on the app (Thistlebend Discipleship app/Discipleship Studies/Study Specific Name) or on our website, ([www.thistlebend.org/Resources/Study Specific Companion Resources](http://www.thistlebend.org/Resources/Study%20Specific%20Companion%20Resources)).

You can find the lecture passwords on the last page of this workbook.

Church and Neighborhood Small Group Suggested Study Schedule

(Note: You can find the 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. 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. This class 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 most recent lesson and a small group discussion of the lesson.
 - 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 into 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 begins the discussion of the week's homework. First, we will discuss the lesson's main themes and then review questions for each day.
- 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 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 smaller groups of three to four women. The group sizes 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, we set a time limit of three minutes for each person. Holding 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 sins 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 D, page vii). This relationship 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 get in touch with your small 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/Video Time

Daily Study in the Workbook

Taking the Truth to Heart Time

Begin with Teaching Video or Audio (available online)

- Each week, schedule a day and time to review to the teaching lecture.

Review Discussion Questions (available online)

- Pray, reflect, and notice 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

- The day after you watch or listen to the teaching lecture, begin your workbook homework with Lesson One.
- 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

- On Day Six, complete the “Taking the Truth to Heart” pages (see Exhibits C and D, page vii).
- 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. 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 small group leader will personally respond to you and pray for you.
- 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 our 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 B (Page one of two)



**THISTLEBEND
MINISTRIES**

Thistlebend Affirmation and Commitment

Why we are here:

- Because Christ first loved us and we want to follow Him, trusting His will for our lives, no longer living in the flesh for self anymore
- We want to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love others as ourselves
- We have witnessed the destructive power of sin in our own hearts and lives and by God's grace want to learn how to repent of our sin and walk forward by faith through grace in the power of the Holy Spirit
- We are ready to lay down our pride and humbly admit we don't have it all together and we need help
- We want the support of the body of Christ and are willing to allow someone else to speak truth into our lives because we know we have blind spots we cannot see
- We believe Jesus has called us to pick up our cross and follow Him and we want practical help to know that looks like in our lives

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

Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength
 and 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
 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
 Growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
 Picking up your cross and denying self
 Offering yourself as a living sacrifice
 Living as members of one body
 Faithful Obedience to God's Word
 Speaking the Truth in Love
 Forgiving as you have been forgiven

Exhibit C (See Day Six of Lesson One)

Day Six

— ✠ —

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

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

2 Peter 3:18

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back

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

STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart

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

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

Exhibit D (See Day Six of Lesson One)

Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

1

Step One
*Taking the Truth
To Heart*

2

Step Two
*Putting the Flesh
To Death*

3

Step Three
*Bringing the Truth
To Life*

NAME	SCRIPTURE	SIN	ACTION

A NOTE ABOUT THIS STUDY: A significant portion of “Jesus, I Need You” is based on the Beatitudes from Matthew 5, which is part of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. (The follow-up study, “Jesus, I Want to Love You” is a study based on the Sermon on the Mount, subject by subject, from Matthew 5-7.) The Beatitudes show the progression of our need for Jesus and include everything from being poor in spirit and in abject spiritual poverty and being unable to save ourselves, to being persecuted for the sake of Christ. We cannot produce any of the “blessed attributes” in the Beatitudes. They all come from Him.

Before we climb the mount to sit under Jesus’ teaching on the Beatitudes, we want to prepare our hearts to receive His teaching. The purpose of our studies is to uncover the historical context of the coming of Christ from the Gospel of Matthew to the several Old Testament prophecies over 400 hundred years before His birth that told of His coming and purpose. Our purpose is also to spend time tracing the steps of John the Baptist and of Jesus before He began His public ministry. This preparation is necessary as we unfold the teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes, set aside the demands of our present-day world, and sit at His feet to hear Him. Our ultimate aim is to know Jesus truly.

1



Jesus, I Need You

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:22-23

Behold. A virgin bore a son, the Son of God. Immanuel. God with us. The Word in the flesh. The Light of the World. The Son of David. The Son of Abraham. The Messiah. The Son of God, Jesus.

...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:6-11)

I need Jesus. I want to know Him intimately and follow Him fully. I want to know Him better than anyone—better than I know my husband, my children, my closest friends, or even myself. I know that to pursue this goal, I must be intentional. I must put away all distractions, resist temptations, make sacrifices, set aside other pursuits, and make Him my sole focus. All my worries, hopes, dreams, anxieties, hurts, to-do lists, and circumstances in my life and other’s must take a back seat to me earnestly seeking after the Lord.

Every morning for many months, I set my alarm for an earlier hour, nestled myself in the corner of my living room couch, and opened my Bible to the Gospels. I read them over and over again, studying commentary after commentary. Throughout that time, one particular passage remained with me: Matthew 5:1-2. This passage says, “*Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them.*” In these verses I saw Jesus’ compassion and willingness to go to the people and meet them right where they were. The Son of God came to His own and brought them the truth and light of the gospel. Luke records Jesus’ words in his gospel: “*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (Lk.19:10).

I longed to follow Jesus up that mount, sit at His feet, and hear Him teach. I desired for a heart that would hear all that He taught. Then, as I read Matthew 9:35-38, I saw His compassion for the lost and His desire to bring the hope of eternal life found only in Himself:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (NKJV)

It is compelling to think about Jesus’ compassion and willingness to meet us where we are. I do not want to live a self-focused life; I want to live a life fixed upon Christ and seeking the things of Christ. Yet, sometimes it seems as though a chasm greater than the widest canyon lays before me in this.

I think to myself, “He seems so close and yet so far away. I desperately need Him close. I don’t want to do life alone. I don’t want to do things my way; I want to follow Jesus. I need Jesus not just in my Bible, but I need Him in person, in a real relationship—not just as some idea, a list of “dos and don’ts,” a doctrine, or a cause. I need Jesus Himself.”

I would loved to have been able to know Jesus when He walked this earth; to travel by His side, listen to Him, and watch Him respond to people. Often I have wanted to run to Him, lay my head on His shoulder, pour out my heart, have Him put His arms around me, and speak His truth to me—even the hard truth. Even more, however, I long to know Him here and now.

Do you not want that too? Is it possible? Can Jesus be that real? Yes, He can be that real and that tangible even though we cannot see Him, hear Him, or touch Him. In salvation, all those who turn towards Christ and put their trust in Him and in His death on the cross are far closer to Jesus than if they followed by His side during His days upon the earth. As Christians, we are not merely close to Christ. Instead, we are in Christ and Christ is in us. Galatians 2:20 gives us a glimpse of

this reality: *“For I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* If we have been crucified with Christ, we believe by faith that the Immanuel who walked the earth years ago is the same Immanuel who has compassion on us, walks with us, and lives *in us!*

...

OUR WAYS ARE NOT HIS WAYS

We desire to know Jesus deeply, but there is something that hinders us in this pursuit—our remaining sin! Our sinful flesh is solely me-centered. It blinds us and impedes the real, tangible, intimate relationship with Jesus we desire. We can be so full of ourselves but we need to be filled with Him. We are never going to deeply know Jesus and experience oneness with Him until we grasp how much our old ways of living are not His ways. Therefore, we must fight the battle against sin vigilantly. In our desire to truly know Jesus and become like Him, we must remember that although our sinful nature was put to death on the cross, sin still remains very present and active throughout the remainder of our lives. It is equally important to remember, however, that in salvation, we are rescued from the penalty of sin and given the Holy Spirit’s power to overcome it. Make no mistake. There is a foundational distinction between the dominion of sin in the life of an unsaved person versus the presence and power of remaining sin in the life of a believer. Sin that remains after salvation loses its control, but remains extremely dangerous. It is a force to be reckoned with. In the words of John Owen, one must always “be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”¹ It is an insidious foe that resists all righteousness. Owen writes:

When we realize a constant enemy of the soul abides within us, what diligence and watchfulness we should have! How woeful is the sloth and negligence then of so many who live blind and asleep to this reality of sin. There is an exceeding efficacy and power in the indwelling sin of believers, for it constantly inclines itself towards evil. We need to be awake, then, if our hearts would know the ways of God. Our enemy is not only upon us, as it was with Samson, but it is also in us.²

We must learn to discern the difference between God’s ways and our ways, because we cannot follow both ways simultaneously. We cannot keep our own life and live in Christ. It does not work. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (Js. 1:8) We will be confused, unsettled, tossed back and forth, up and down. We must decide whom we will serve: Christ or ourselves? We must come to terms with the fact that if we are to have a real relationship with Jesus Christ, we must die to ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. We cannot serve both, Christ and self.

Daily, we must turn towards God, leave our ways behind, and seek after Christ, His kingdom, and His righteousness no matter the cost. This is what it means to follow Jesus, and this is how we come to know Him better than anyone—including our husbands, children, closest friends, and even ourselves.

Whether we like it or not, we are part of the very fabric of our culture. We do not realize how much the world influences our Christian lives. It is often very difficult for us to distinguish our ways from God's ways. Whether or not we were raised in Christian or non-Christian homes, we acquire habits, thought patterns, and reasoning from many sources other than Jesus Christ. These ways of the world seem "right" to us. We may have the mentality of, "that is just the way we do things." The world's ways may appear to be completely normal and acceptable.

The church in America is heavily influenced by the culture that it often looks and sounds just like the culture. In attempting to be relevant, the church waters down its message and compromises the truth. There are those who, in their effort to be different than the culture, are only that—different. Sometimes, the focus turns to external conformities, rather than internal transformation. Ideology and political partisanship have sidelined the gospel. The love, righteousness, and holiness of Christ are lost in translation and the message becomes devoid of the gospel. Many of us may discover that we are in the same predicament as the church. We have attempted to get all of our ducks in a row. *Check!* Our doctrine correct. *Check!* Our head knowledge imported. *Check!* Our appearances in compliance. *Check!* Our to-do and not-to-do lists are completed. *Check!* We are all set! Phew! We've got it! We're safe! Really? Is this what Jesus has in mind?

None of us realize all the false doctrine we pick up along the way. It is a part of the human condition. We have all grown up amid a culture and world corrupted by sin and a church immersed in that culture. Our ability to see is clouded. Although we are saints, sinners saved by grace, we have remaining sin. A fog settles in. Apart from God's grace, we are blind. We cannot see at all, let alone clearly. We need Jesus.

...

LOOKING AT OURSELVES, NOT OTHERS

Another thing that hinders our pursuit of Christ is our inclination to compare ourselves to others. It is easier to see someone else relying on their own insight, giving into their flesh, or being carried away by the winds of the world than to see ourselves swept away. We tend to look at others and say, "Look what they are doing. I am not as bad as that!" and then write off our own thoughts and actions as acceptable and right. This and other similar ideas may have inspired Jesus' familiar words in Matthew 7:5: "*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck*

out of your brother's eye." We all need Jesus. No one can do this in their own strength. We need the help and power of the Holy Spirit.

When we hear the word hypocrite, it is as though our heads spin around to see who Jesus is talking about. Why is that? Is it because we are inclined to think He must be talking about someone else? We see ourselves through our own eyes. As a result, we do not ask the Lord to help us see ourselves the way He sees us. We need to stop dead in our tracks and consider He might be referring to us. We would do well turn toward Jesus and ask Him for help, but we often remain entrenched in our own ways of doing things and continue walking down our well-worn paths. We need Jesus.

•••

HIS HEART, HIS POWER, HIS LOVE

By God's sovereign grace, we come to this study to pursue Christ and to love Him deeply. May the things of this world grow strangely dim and we only see Jesus. No longer do we want to be knowingly or unknowingly fused with the culture. We want to become truly one with Christ. Jesus and the gospel must be preeminent in our minds, hearts, and lives. We want *His* answers to our challenges, pressures, loneliness, and heartaches. We want to walk in His love and His power, not in our flesh and our strength. No matter what life brings our way, we want to respond to each situation, each person, and each trial in the way Jesus would respond—not just outwardly—but in the Spirit, the River of Living Water. Christ in us and we in Him. By God's grace, we must strive to be so close in step with Jesus that He flows out of all we do and say. May we abide in Him, *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:4-5).

After Jesus was baptized, John the Baptist declared, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (Jn. 3:30). We want Jesus instead of us. We want God to transform our hearts from the inside out. We would never desire this apart from Christ. We all long to see Christ increase and ourselves decrease. God can do amazing things within our hearts. He can move mountains and grant us a genuine desire for Him that surpasses all human understanding. Ezekiel 11:19 says, *"I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."* We want God to move the mountains within our hearts and minds. We cannot do it, but He can.

Our spiritual journey is fraught with many difficulties. We face great opposition due to our unconscious resistance to change; we are led astray by our old ways of thinking; we are hindered by going ahead of the Lord in our own efforts; we are paralyzed by a hidden, underlying fear of losing our identity and control; and we are deceived by the impression that we have it all figured out. We need Jesus.

We need Jesus to lift our heads above the fog, above the clouds, to give us eyes to see Him. We need Him to humble our hearts to grant us the willingness to lose our identity, relinquish control, lay aside our perspective, and follow Him. This is only possible by His grace, through faith. Will you cry out to Jesus now? Ask Jesus to give you a heart for Him and Him alone—His will, His way, His love—alone. He will answer.

...

JESUS, I NEED YOU

Consider what would happen if we intentionally put ourselves and our ways aside to pursue Jesus with our all. This intention is what *Jesus, I Need You* is all about. We need to immerse our hearts and minds in Jesus. My prayer is that He gives all of us ears to hear Him in His Word. Let us ask Him to direct our minds, energies, and hearts to be more and more focused on Him and less and less on ourselves and our circumstances. Join with me in praying:

Jesus, I need you. I want you only. You alone are my great reward. I understand that because of God's gift of the Holy Spirit to me—Christ in me—I can know you more than I ever dreamed possible this side of heaven. Your Word says that you can be my all in all (Eph. 1:23; Phil. 1:21). How? Because you are with me always. You are the living Word! Because your Spirit dwells within me, I can know you more intimately than a spouse, a father, a mother, a sister, or a lifelong best friend. I want that to be true for me. Jesus, I need you.

Christ's love for us and His interest in our lives is far greater than we will ever comprehend. We underestimate what the Lord will do for us and be to us. As a result we often get in the way. It is my prayer, however, that He will take us out of the way and grant us His grace, His mercy, and His lovingkindness to enable us to see Him, know Him, love Him, and be like Him. Let us ask Him to do this. He tells us that if we ask in His name, He will do it: "*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it*" (Jn. 14:13-14).

...

Close in prayer. Ask the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to draw you closer to Jesus, transform your heart, and make you more like Christ.

Day Two



QUIET MOMENT

We need Jesus. We need to Him to open the eyes of our hearts to see things from His perspective. We want to ask Him to establish our foundation in Him and a more intimate understanding of Him as we begin our journey into the book of Matthew and the other Gospels.

In our fallen state we have a sinful propensity to wander from the truth. Eighteenth century hymn writer Robert Robinson expressed it this way, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”³ As believers, our sinful flesh remains even though we have the Holy Spirit. It is easy to lose our focus and our vision. The culture around us influences us. We give into temptation. We wander unknowingly.

The people of Israel were God’s chosen people. Time and time again God delivered them from their oppressors, provided for them miraculously, and demonstrated His power and love to them in many ways. Still, they, too, were influenced by their culture, continued to be enticed by the idols and things around them, and wandered away. Each time God rescued them they forgot Him and forgot that He was all they needed. Read these words:

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: ‘Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.’ Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. (Is. 1:2-4)

We are warned in 1 Corinthians 10 to be careful and not follow in the path of the Israelites. Read through the passage below. As you go through your day today, consider: Do you long for the things of this world? Do you doubt God’s ways? Where do you doubt? When do you wander?

1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1

GOING DEEPER

1. Do you hear God's heart for His people in today's passages from Isaiah 1 and Corinthians 10? How does He feel about their wanderings and idolatry? What does He deeply desire?

2. Continue reading in Isaiah 1:1-20 in your Bible and then answer the following questions.

How does God describe Israel, their behavior, and their heart condition?

What does He ask them to do?

How does He encourage them in verses 18-20?

3. Reflecting back on 1 Corinthians 10:1-22, consider Paul's exhortation to the church in Corinth. Even with the Holy Spirit in us, we are prone to sin just like Israel! Pray and ask the Lord to shine the light of His Word in your heart and reveal any areas of idolatry (of people or things or ideas, etc.), indulgence, testing of the Lord, or grumbling. Write what He reveals about your heart and the areas you need to bring before Him.

The Lord delights in your earnestness and diligence. A repentant, contrite heart He will not despise. Read Psalm 25 and make David's prayer your own.

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.

Day Three



QUIET MOMENT

God's holiness—His purity, greatness, goodness, and majesty—set Him far apart from His creation. He is completely “other” and different from His creation. Yet, desires a relationship with His people and He reveals Himself to us in ways that change us and help us know Him. In the following passage, listen carefully and prayerfully as Isaiah relates how God revealed Himself to him and notice Isaiah's humility:

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
(Is. 6:1-5)

God revealed Himself to Isaiah in a vision. Suddenly, Uzziah seemed like nothing to Isaiah, and Isaiah felt like nothing before the presence of the most holy God. He was undone. The more Isaiah saw God, the more he saw himself and how much he was just like the world around him. John Calvin writes, “He was so completely overpowered by this extraordinary vision as to forget he was a prophet. For there was no feeling in him which was not overpowered by the presence of God, so that, like one who had lost his senses, he willingly plunged himself in darkness, or rather, like one who despaired of life, he of his own accord chose to die.”⁴ With his heart so broken and so grieved, Isaiah humbled himself before the Lord and cried out to God in anguish.

Will you follow Isaiah's example? Will you ask the Lord to grant you His grace to humble yourself before Him? God hears us when we pray according to His Word. I pray that the Lord will reveal Himself to you, that you will see God for who He is, see yourself for who you are, and then desire Him far more than yourself. Will you make that your prayer now? Ask God to help you long for Him and to reveal Himself to you. Read the psalm below and write out your heart cry to God.

Psalm 42

GOING DEEPER

1. When we draw near to Immanuel, humbly bow down before Him, He draws near to us and do a miraculous work in our hearts: “*A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise*” (Ps. 51:17). Ask the Lord to speak to your heart as you read the following passage from Isaiah again. Some of it is a repeat of what you read earlier, but it will be helpful to read it again.

Isaiah 6

What does God do in response to Isaiah’s confession and repentance (which we read about earlier today)?

What is Isaiah’s response?

How might you respond if the Lord said, “Whom shall I send?”

2. How would you describe your current heart attitude towards the Lord and His Word? Do you feel hopeful and excited? Or do you complacent, disillusioned, apathetic, or indifferent? Confess, just as Isaiah confessed his condition, knowing that the Lord has taken away your guilt and atoned for your sin in Jesus. Lay your heart before the Lord and ask Him to bring it to life.

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

Remember God’s love in the gospel, that you died with Christ and He now lives in you.
Walk in His love. Take God’s Word to heart, submit to it, and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.

Day Four



QUIET MOMENT

As we seek Jesus, and say to Him, “Jesus, I need you,” we want to be diligently watching over our hearts. Jesus tells us in John 15:2, every branch that does not bear fruit He removes. This statement warns us to examine our hearts. Are we bearing the fruit of the Spirit, “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Gal. 5:22-23). A healthy vine grows measurably and produces fruit. Jesus goes on to say “*every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit*” (Jn.15:2). Pruning helps promote growth. God promises new life in Christ. Be ready to be pruned. What do you fear when you think about God pruning you? Make a list below.

If we are in Christ, we will not be removed, but we will be pruned. We will not be cut off, but we must continue to examine our hearts and lives. Let us bow before the Lord now, confess our sin, and repent. There is no need to fear. Read David’s psalm of confession below and allow the Spirit to search your heart. Write a prayer of confession.

Psalm 51

If you do consider yourself a Christian but are not bearing much fruit, do not run and hide. Do not be afraid. Do not dismiss it as just the way things are; do not allow self-interest, the world, or the temptations of Satan to take you off course. Be fiercely diligent to pursue Christ. We cannot produce fruit on our own; we need Christ to produce it in us. So, regardless of where you are in your walk with the Lord, draw near to Him. Share your concerns. Allow Him to do what He needs to do so that you will bear much fruit.

When someone is *not* bearing fruit, there is cause for concern. Isaiah 10:33-34 says, “*Behold, the Lord God of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. 34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.*” This sounds terrifying, but it is important. Listen carefully. You want to be sure you are in Christ. If you have a sense that you are not, do not hesitate to humbly ask someone for help. Those who have a broken and contrite heart God does not despise (Ps. 51:17). Cry out to the Lord. He meets all of us right where we are.

GOING DEEPER

1. God expresses His lovingkindness through His warnings. We need warnings because we get caught up in the sinful ways around us, carried away by human thinking, and our selfish pursuits. Read the following passage and note the warnings He gives to Israel. Observe the encouragement He gives. Write your observations in the space provided.

Isaiah 30-31

2. Throughout the Old Testament, when God's people were troubled by the world around them and struggling with their hardships and difficulties, they often sought comfort and assistance from others or from worldly solutions. They tried to fix things in their own strength instead of looking to God. We are all prone to rely on our own insight, lean on our own understanding. We fail to turn to God and put our hope and trust in Him. Matthew Henry states in his Concise Commentary on Isaiah 30, "See what dangers men run into who forsake God to follow their carnal confidences. The Creator is the Rock of ages, the creature a broken reed; we cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God. Our strength is to sit still, in humble dependence upon God and his goodness, and quiet submission to his will."⁵ Ask God to help you look to Him alone and be your all in all.

Let this be a springboard to your own prayer today, “Lord, may I trust in you, your Word, and your power more and more each day. May I look to you and not to the answers and solutions of this world. Pour over me, in me, and through me, by your Spirit, Lord. Be my all in all.”

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

Remember God’s love in the gospel, that you died with Christ and He now lives in you.
Walk in His love. Take God’s Word to heart, submit to it, and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.

Day Five



QUIET MOMENT

We need Jesus. Isaiah spoke of the people's rebellion and need, but he also declared the promise that One would come and meet that need—more than seven hundred years before His birth. He prophesied, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). Prophecy is most simply described as “a message from God.”

Revealing the future is often, but not always, an element of prophecy. The Old Testament, according to some, contains 300-400 future predictions about Jesus. The new day that Isaiah spoke of finally dawned, and the time came.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Mt. 1:18-25)

Ponder God's amazing power and wisdom as demonstrated in this fulfilled prophecy. Make your response one of worship. Praise God as King of kings, Lord of lords, and sovereign over all. Humble your heart and worship the mighty, merciful God we serve. Write your prayer below.

GOING DEEPER

1. Matthew Henry said in his commentary, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, sooner than one tittle of the word of God. . . . The salvation of a sinner begins with a humble and contrite heart, that trembles at God’s word, with godly sorrow working true repentance, and faith in his mercy, through the obedience unto death of our Divine Surety. Christ, as the Divine righteousness and salvation to his people, would come in the appointed time.”⁶ Many prophecies spoken long ago by God’s prophets are not yet fulfilled, but we know for certain they will all come to pass. The use of the word “tittle” means that not a single letter will be omitted or forgotten. The spoken prophecies are for our good and His glory. God is God. May His will be done. Read the verses below.

Isaiah 48:3-5

2. Authentic biblical prophecies are spoken by God through men called for this very purpose and they always come to pass. prophecies. Consider God’s prophetic Word as you read the following passage.

2 Peter 1:19-21

3. Take a moment to read Matthew’s account of the arrival of Christ.

Matthew 1-2

4. The genealogy recorded in Matthew 1 begins the lineage of Jesus with Abraham (Gen. 12:3) and then through Isaac (Gen. 26:4), Jacob (Gen. 28:14), Judah (Gen. 49:8–12), Jesse (Is. 11:1), and David (Is. 9:7). The fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies are recorded in these chapters.

Seeing the intricate continuity and precision of God’s Word and its veracity establishes and strengthens our faith. Read the following Old Testament prophecies about Jesus and jot down a few key points. Note that many of these prophecies are in Matthew 1-2 and that some are not entirely fulfilled yet.

Genesis 22:18

Psalm 2

Micah 5:2

Malachi 3:1

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 9:1-2

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 11:1-5

Isaiah 16:5

Hosea 11:1

4. Praise God for knowing our deep need, His lovingkindness to send Jesus in the flesh to die for us, and Jesus' lasting presence with us as our Immanuel. Praise God for His perfect plan. How privileged we are to see it unfold! Reflect on Jesus, His love, and His sacrifice as you prayerfully read this prophetic chapter in Isaiah.

Isaiah 53

TAKING THE TRUTH TO HEART

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

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

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

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.

Day Six



Taking the Truth to Heart and Bringing It to Life

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

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back

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

STEP ONE: Taking the Truth to Heart

Review the Taking the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Then, choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to renew your mind and transform your heart (Rom.12:2). Write out the Scripture below.

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

STEP TWO: Putting the Flesh to Death

What sin (i.e., wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) are you convicted of in relation to the Scripture you wrote? Confess this in writing. Also, include an example of where you recognized the evidence of this sin in your life this week. Finally, ask for the Lord's forgiveness and receive His mercy and grace (1 Jn. 1:9-10).

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

STEP THREE: Bringing the Truth to Life

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

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

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

Taking the Truth to Heart Guide

This chart is to be filled out on class day.

1

Step One

*Taking the Truth
To Heart*

>

2

Step Two

*Putting the Flesh
To Death*

>

3

Step Three

*Bringing the Truth
To Life*

NAME	SCRIPTURE	SIN	ACTION