

SAMPLE LESSON
NOT FOR RESALE

Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY



Focus Scripture

PSALM 63

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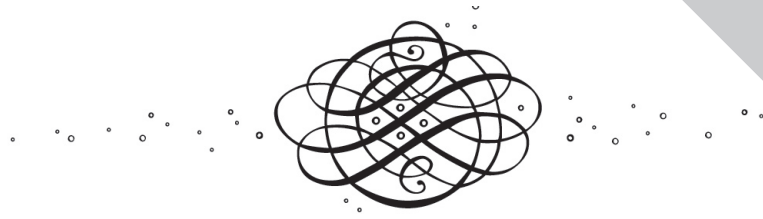
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We invite you to visit our website to view the “Welcome” section and additional sample lessons, which are also available to download.

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We look forward to serving you,
The Thistlebend Team





SAMPLE LESSON
NOT FOR RESALE

Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

Focus Scripture: Psalm 63

by Laurie Aker

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

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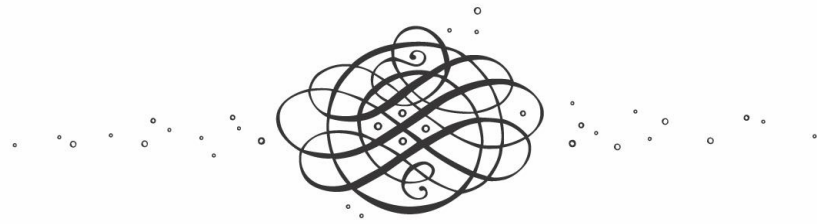


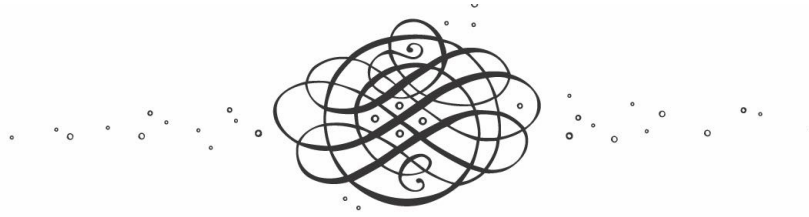
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An Important Note:

Information about our lecture audios and videos,
including their online passwords, can be found on the
last page of this workbook.



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. Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner commends, “*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 we ask may differ from other Bible studies on the same subject. Nevertheless, women participating in Thistlebend studies often share that 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 lesson where we ask women to “Take the Truth to Heart” and “Bring the Truth 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,

Laurie and the Thistlebend Team



O God, You Are My God

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

One late spring morning, I was perched high upon a rock overlooking a spectacular vista of the Gulf of Maine. On my left stood St. Anne's Church, a small rustic chapel constructed in the 1800's of large sea-washed stones from the gulf. On my right was an outdoor chapel situated at the mouth of the Kennebunk River. Waves were crashing below me, exploding on the rocks like fireworks on a Fourth of July night. A perfectly clear blue sky extended above me. The wisps of clouds stretching across the vast canopy contrasted the jagged edges of Maine's rocky coast. The scene's grandeur humbled me with a new perspective. In the presence of God and His creation, I was lifted up, beyond the temporal, into a place of tender communion with the Lord. Overcome with praise and thanksgiving, I opened my Bible to a familiar psalm and poured out my heart to the Lord.

*1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

*2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

*3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

*4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world. (Ps. 19:1-4)*

I looked up to see a large schooner gracefully piercing the waves, heading into the harbor. The sun was now high in the sky. Along the shore strolled an older couple. As they approached the water's edge, they stopped, mesmerized by the view. Motionless for a while; then, they turned to look at each other, kissed, and returned their gaze to the view. Their exchange showed me a beautiful picture of the



shared love and tenderness that exists within a deep and abiding relationship with other people or our Lord Himself. The Lord desires intimate fellowship with His people like I was experiencing with Him that morning. At that moment on the gulf, the Lord was answering my ongoing plea to know Him more fully. Earlier that day, I had read of Moses' desire:

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

I felt as though I was in the cleft of His love. I was experiencing the sovereign grace and mercy that He extends to those He calls to Himself. I pondered the truth of His Word and His faithfulness, that He is the God who answers our prayers in ways beyond our expectations. I journaled a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. As I finished, I looked down and saw a stone wedged deep into a rocky crevice by my side. The flat skipping stone had taken the shape of an Old Testament tablet. I picked it up and turned it over in my hands, feeling the smooth sides worn down by the sea. As a collector of rocks, I pocketed this souvenir of my tender moment with the Lord.

The Lord wants us to walk with Him, side by side, step by step, with our hearts knit to His and His knit to ours, intimately sharing life's moments together. Our God is so awesome and mighty, yet He is willing to meet with us, as small and insignificant as we are. He hears our prayers and answers the cries of our hearts, calling us to enter into a deep and abiding relationship with Him. Intimate. Loving. Life-giving. Life-changing. Our Beloved invites us to communion with Him, like the lover in Solomon's Song. Some interpret the Song to have been written expressly about the romantic relationship between a husband and wife. Given that marriage pictures the relationship of Christ and the church, the Song's significance expands for New Testament believers. Consider the possibility of a dual meaning in this book, one that also expresses the love relationship the Lord desires to have with His bride, the church.¹



“My beloved speaks and says to me: ‘Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; 11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.’” (Sg. 2:10-13 NRSV)

This invitation to intimate relationship extends from God Most High, Creator of the universe. R.C. Sproul describes the wonder of creation, “... God created the world out of nothing. Creation was something like the magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Except God didn’t have a rabbit, and He didn’t even have a hat. God created the world from nothing. Once there was nothing, then suddenly, by the command of God, there was a universe.”² The Bible begins with this very act: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:1-3).*

What could we desire more than to enter an intimate and loving relationship with this God? This God, who has such unfathomable power and wisdom to create the universe from nothing, desires a relationship with us. He greatly rejoices over His people (Zep. 3:17). For us, there is no sweeter thing in this world than communion with Him. As a husband desires the devotion and companionship of his wife, the Lord desires the devotion and companionship of His bride, the church. He will glorify Himself in and through us as we fully delight in Him. *“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved’” (Rom. 9:25).* The Lord seeks us earnestly. Let us respond gratefully to His tender invitation to join in His love, saying in our hearts and with our lives, *“My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Sg. 2:16).*

So, how do we enter into His love? How does a relationship with God Most High develop, and what is our part? How do we relate to the Creator of the universe—the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the almighty One who is holy and worthy of all our worship and praise? You might wonder, “How can this God who is so holy, so magnificent, and so mighty desire a relationship with someone as lowly as me?” Furthermore, you may wonder if it is possible to have a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord, especially if you perceive a chasm too vast to bridge between His divinity and your humanity, separating you from Him. Believers sometimes contemplate such thoughts.



The goal of this study is to explore these questions and learn to fall in love again with our Lord—or to fall in love with Him for the very first time. Of course, the expression “falling in love” is merely an idiom summarizing a heartfelt desire to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength as He commands (Dt. 6:5, Mk. 12:30). If we love God, we will love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39). As followers of Christ, we want to know His love and walk in close fellowship with Him. Still, often our spiritual eyes strain to see Him. We are uncertain how to love Him and seek Him when we cannot see Him. We fail to comprehend His boundless, unconditional love. We struggle to believe His Word and walk with Him by His grace. We may know that an intimate relationship with the Lord is possible, but we have been discouraged in our attempts to attain it. Perhaps we have experienced this relationship in part but desire to know Him more.

Be encouraged! In this study, we will focus on our relationship with the Lord and immerse ourselves in His Word, to know Him, love Him, and follow Him more than ever before. David’s prayer in Psalm 63 will be our guide to examine and emulate David’s relationship with the Lord. Throughout this study, we will continually ask the Lord to reveal Himself and teach us about the enduring relationship He desires to have with us. We will learn how to obediently and earnestly follow Him by His grace.

As we begin our journey of falling in love again with the Lord, we must start with the gospel, God’s ultimate act of love through Jesus Christ. His love is the source of our salvation and the very root of our relationship with Him. What do we mean when we talk about the gospel? And why do we need it?

God, the Lord of all and Creator of all, has given us all things; therefore, we owe Him all things. Mankind was created good but fell prey to temptation and sinned against God, bringing sin and death into the world. In merciful love and grace, God made a way to rescue us from hell and restore us to Himself. He responded to our rebellion by sending His Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sin, which is eternal death, and separation from God. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, bore the wrath that we sinners deserved, died in our place, and rose again, overcoming sin and death. Jesus now reigns in heaven over all, and salvation comes through Him alone.

Contemplate this astounding exchange: Jesus took our sin and unrighteousness upon Himself on the cross and gave us His righteousness in return (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of His death and resurrection, forgiveness of sin and eternal life are available to all who put their faith in Christ by God’s grace. *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people”* (Ti. 2:11). If we believe in Christ and trust Him alone as our Savior, then God forgives all our sin, declares us righteous in Christ, adopts us as His own, and gives us every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3-6).



As demonstrated in the gospel, God's love is essential and foundational to every part of our life in relationship with Him. The Bible tells us God is love (1 Jn. 4:7-8, 16). If God Himself is love, then He is our example and standard for love and our source of love. Do you know this love? Are you walking in the reality of God's love for you? Not only do we want to know His love and live in His love, but also we want to love Him back as He has loved us.

With these truths in mind, I would love to share a bit of my story. Every Sunday morning, I looked forward to going to church. I sang every hymn with fervor and knew every liturgical prayer and response almost by heart. At fifteen, I joined the adult choir, riding four miles on my bicycle to the weeknight practices. However, I paid little attention to Jesus or His relevance to my daily life.

In my mid-twenties, my salvation experience instantly transformed my life. My husband, Kevin, was out of town on business, and I was home alone caring for our six-month-old daughter. My mom came for a visit to help me and celebrate my birthday. On Saturday afternoon, while running errands together, we shared a heart-to-heart conversation. I admitted that although Kevin and I were going to church, Sundays demanded serious effort because church felt like an empty ritual. I had to drag myself out of bed and make myself go. I knew attending was an essential part of a relationship with God, so I wanted it to be much more than an empty routine; I wanted to want to go to church. My mom mentioned a church in the area that she thought I might like, and we went together the following morning. Unknowingly, we had the wrong time and arrived late. The service was well underway, so we stood quietly in the door.

Something life-changing and heart-altering occurred in what seemed like only a fraction of a second. My eyes were opened! I had been "blind," but then I could "see." It was not something that someone said or did in the service. It was not something I did. It was none other than God the Holy Spirit moving in my heart. In that instant, I understood that Jesus was not merely a good man who died two thousand years ago, but that He was the Son of God who rose again and now lives and reigns in heaven. I had believed in God and worshiped Him on Sunday mornings—or so I thought—but I never understood the purpose of this Man, Jesus. He seemed to be an odd add-on. Unnecessary. Irrelevant. That morning, though, something was very different; I saw Jesus for who He was. All the things I had heard growing up in church raced suddenly to the forefront of my mind: Jesus was the Lamb of God, Immanuel, God with us. He came to save His people from their sins, by taking upon Himself the punishment we deserved. He was crucified, but then He rose again. The pieces were fitting together in a new and personal way. He was my Savior. He bore my sins. He was crucified on my behalf. I was transported to a new reality.



Oddly, I do not remember saying anything to my mother before she left that day. However, when my husband returned home that evening, he came home to an entirely different wife. I could not stop talking about Jesus. Something inside me was transformed. Never again did I struggle to get out of bed on Sunday mornings, no matter how little sleep I may have had the night before. The love of God and my gratitude for His grace compelled me. I fervently sought to grow in Christ however I could, pursuing every possible avenue to do just that. I volunteered on committees, participated in Bible studies, prayed, sang hymns, journaled, and volunteered more. I could not seem to get enough. I even wanted to devote my life to serving the Lord in full-time ministry.

Years went by. We had a second child, a third, and then a fourth. By this time, my husband had also come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. My passion and pursuit for God continued. Along the way, the Lord led us to a new church. We rejoiced to hear the gospel preached more clearly and to participate in more Bible studies, however, at the same time, something was not quite right. Christian fellowship was difficult to find. No one I encountered talked about things below the surface—like their heart attitudes, thought life, weaknesses—let alone their failures. As a young believer, I did not understand what I was encountering. Looking back, I realized that the lies of legalism were taking control. Women felt they had to look like they had it all together because “good” Christians do not have those sorts of problems.

Inwardly, I wondered, “Am I the only one who struggles with ungodly thoughts, sins, and weaknesses? Is there something wrong with me?” I went to an older, godly woman in our church to ask for help. She told me, “Go home. Love your husband and your children.” The problem was that I did not know how.

A feeling of isolation crept in, taking a toll on my heart. The daily demands of life with four children, a focused executive husband, and ongoing extended family crises just added to my growing feelings of failure and the pain of loneliness and isolation. I was stretched thin, growing weary, running on empty, and I did not know what to do. All of the pain and pressure was more than I could face head on, so I just steeled my resolve and focused on carrying on because I felt alone. My feelings were strong but my faith was weak.

I realize now that I did not know how to live in the blessings that God had given to me in Christ. I did not know how to put my flesh to death, put my hope in God, and walk forward in the Spirit by grace through faith. When we come to Christ, God gives us every spiritual blessing. Growing in the Christian life is a process of learning to use all these treasures God has given us in Christ. Early in my walk of faith, I had little idea of how to do so!



This is a good place to conclude my story. You may identify with some or all of what I have shared. Countless women are in the same place. For many, it is not so much that we have lost our grip on God's promises; it is that we have never learned how to integrate the truths into our hearts and apply them to our core beliefs.

Take a moment to think through what you have read today and close in prayer. I pray that our time in God's Word during this study will strengthen our faith in the power of the gospel and God's love for us. What is more, may it deepen our love for the Lord and establish an intimate relationship with Him. You may use this suggested prayer to help you get started:

O God, you are my God. I want you to be my God. You are worthy of all my worship, all my praise, all my heart, soul, mind, and strength! Please meet me where I am and bring me closer to you. Thank you for promising in your Word that when we draw near to you, you draw near to us (Jas. 4:8). Wherever someone or something is taking your place, please reveal it to me by your grace. Grant me repentance to confess and forsake all else to seek your face humbly and love you above all.

In Jesus' name, I pray,
Amen.



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

D A Y T W O

Read Psalm 63:1-8 and listen to how David describes His relationship with God. Then turn to the Table of Contents at the beginning of the book. As you read the titles of the lessons, find each title in the passage below and underline it. Write your own brief prayer below each verse, expressing your heart's response to each one.

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



In Psalm 63:1, David proclaims, “*O God, you are my God.*” We want to declare that in unison with *all* of our heart, soul, mind, and strength: “*O God, you are my God!*” This confession is key because our love, devotion, and trust in Him impacts how we think about and respond to the Bible, which in turn impacts how we obey and apply the Bible to our lives. Love cannot be separated from obedience. Our doctrine—or set of beliefs—determines our deeds, because our doctrine is derived from what we saturate ourselves in, whether it is God’s Word or something else (like culture or academia or

family/parental influence, etc.). Whether we realize it or not, we all hold to a set of beliefs that rules how we respond to life. The Lord calls us to be zealous in our love for Him, for His Word, and for good deeds, all for His pleasure and His glory. If we love Him, we will embrace His Word, and we will obey Him (Jn. 14:15). God will be our God.



Take a spiritual inventory, prayerfully considering where you think you are in your walk with the Lord. Reflect on your relationship with Him, where it began, where you have been, where you are now, and where you hope to go. Ask the Spirit to reveal the truth and guide you to growth. You are not alone; other saints share some of their struggles, joys, and desires below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Do any of these accounts resonate with you? Some of us are afraid to discover what lies beneath the surface, to see the unbelief and complacency connected to our sin. *Unbelief* because we cannot imagine God really being able to change our hearts. We cannot remember ever being any other way, even though we have prayed and tried to change. Unbelief is also the root of sin itself. We sin when we do not believe God's way is best or God's way is true. *Complacency*, because responsibilities of family, church, school, and work, take precedence, or because distractions pull our attention away from the Lord—a favorite TV show, hobby, or social gathering. We prioritize external activities above the inner condition of our hearts.

If this describes you, now is the perfect time to openly share your thoughts, questions, and doubts with the Lord. Ask Him for His wisdom, help, mercy, and grace to identify rival beliefs and values that hinder your growth in relationship with Him. The questions that follow are meant to spark your thinking process. Write what the Lord reveals to you as you ponder these questions and then bring those revelations before the Lord in prayer.

Are you afraid?

What stirs anxiety?

Do you feel all alone or let down?

Are you anxious about many things?

Do you think you know the Lord well and do not need more Bible study or accountability?

Have things not gone the way you expected?

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

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

Do you find yourself comparing?

Have you been hurt, rejected, overlooked?

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

When are you the happiest?

When are you the most angry?

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you. Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



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

D A Y T H R E E

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

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



When we are in Christ, we belong to God by adoption. We are not our own; we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 7:23): the blood of Jesus Christ. He laid down His sinless life to redeem sinners from worthless, worldly, and wanton living, *“to purify for himself a people”* who would delight in Him and be *“zealous for good works”* (Ti. 2:14). Although many people might say God is their God and believe they are followers of Christ, much of their lives tell a different story. They exhibit the symptoms of a divided heart, worshiping idols of self, the world, and other people, not surrendering in worship to God alone. Assuming they are okay, they continue on, not aware there is a problem. They are not alone, and they are not the first to experience these symptoms. The very church that received Paul's letter left their first love, and their works revealed their misshapen values. Read the following passage from Revelation.

Revelation 2:1-7 (Optional: Read all of Revelation 1-2)

Do you hear Jesus pleading with the church in Ephesus to love Him above all? He is calling to both believers and unbelievers in the congregation at Ephesus⁴ to examine their hearts because there is evidence of *unrepentant* sin among them. They may have thought they forsook everything else, but these verses show us that rivals had displaced Jesus from holding first place in their hearts. Jesus was no longer their supreme love, and as a result, they faced grave danger.

Some tremble when reading Jesus' strong warning to the Ephesian church that He would come and remove their lampstand, indicating that they would lose their status as a church, if they did not repent. Does that mean believers do not sin, or they could lose their salvation? As believers we will still sin, but unrepentant, persistent sin will not be a way of life for us. The mark of a true believer is Holy Spirit-conviction of sin and the habit of repentance. As we repent, we bear evidence that we are in fact His alone. Christ rules, directs, and protects His own: we cannot lose our eternal salvation in Him.



Review the following list. It may be helpful in pinpointing areas submitted to rival mastery and not Jesus' Lordship. Mark any that might be true of you and bring them before the Lord in confession.

Is there anyone you have not forgiven?

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

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

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

Do you like to have everything under control?

Do you like to be in control and struggle when you are not?

Do you just want to have fun? Do you spend too much time on social media?

Are you afraid to uncover things that you do not know how to handle?

Do you find yourself getting angry often?

Is your mind continually wandering?

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

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

Does discontentment, discouragement, or despair weigh you down?

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

What has not been mentioned that may be in the back of your mind?

What other areas of life might the Spirit bring to mind?



We want to take a moment to slow down, even stop to think through who or what we worship. Reflect upon the questions you have just answered. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see and grant you grace to respond truthfully without fear to the following questions. Who or what is on the throne of your heart? Is God your God? Your everything? Do you love Him as He desires? Do you desire your relationship with Him to be deep and abiding? Do you long to walk forward in the truth of God's Word and live in the power of Christ? If not, will you cry out to Him to do the necessary work in your heart? Such change may seem impossible, but because of God's amazing grace, it is not only possible, but it is what God made us for. Romans 5:8 assures us, "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Take this truth to heart and *believe* that the Triune God—Father, Son and Spirit—loves you with an everlasting, unconditional, purifying, perfect love and will bring to completion the good work begun in you (Phil. 1:6). After reflecting on your relationship with the Lord over the past couple days, take a moment to summarize what the Lord has shown you. Ask Him for His grace to proceed in this study with humility, joy, hope, and a tender heart that desires Him above all else.

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you. Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



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

D A Y F O U R

Before we immerse ourselves specifically in Psalm 63 and learn to earnestly seek after the Lord, let us come to the Lord as our Shepherd. A shepherd's job is to protect his flock and guide them to good pastures with plenty of food and water. We are not on this journey alone, our Lord will tenderly lead us and show us the way. The care of our Shepherd frees us from fear to rest in His love, "*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love*" (1 Jn. 4:18). Throughout the lesson, do not hesitate to call on the Lord to meet you where you are and provide all that you truly need, even a heart of repentance. If you do not truly know Him as your personal Lord and Savior, may you come to know His love through Jesus Christ. He is waiting for you with His arms open wide. For those who have known the Lord and experienced His love, He still invites you into a deeper relationship with Him. If we want to love God, "to fall in love with Him," we must rid ourselves of anything that holds us back from giving Him our all. Love is a deliberate act of cherishing someone more than yourself.

Today, we will focus on Psalm 23 to see God as our gentle, loving Shepherd. Read Psalm 23 slowly and note what the psalmist says about God.

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



The Good Shepherd

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

David was a good shepherd. He knew from his experience the tender affection and care a shepherd has towards his flock. He understood what his sheep needed and what a blessing it was to them to have a wise, kind, and devoted leader who was willing to risk his life to protect his flock. David once risked his life to rescue one of his own. Jesus, said, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*” (Jn. 10:11). If the Lord is our Shepherd, then we must be His sheep.

Make a list of the attributes of a good shepherd.

How does the Lord shepherd us?

If the Lord is our Shepherd and we are His sheep, does this impact how you respond to Him?



Restorer of Souls

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

David knew well what it was to be a shepherd, but he also knew what it was to be a sheep. He wandered from the Lord in his own life, and the Lord restored him. The Lord our Shepherd watches attentively over His sheep and restores them to Himself when they wander. As we grow in Christ, we learn increasingly how vulnerable we are to temptation and understand our propensity to sin. Ask the Lord to meet you right where you are. Ask Him to tenderly minister to your soul and reveal where you might be weary, struggling, or wandering. Confess in faith believing that He forgives.

Lord, I confess . . .

Now read the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Ask the Spirit to bear this fruit in your life. Trust Him to restore you and lead you on the right path.

Love	Goodness
Joy	Faithfulness
Peace	Gentleness
Patience	Self-Control
Kindness	



Through the Valley

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

Death may cast its shadow over us, but that is all it can do to Christians. In Christ, we have been delivered from death and its sting. But walking through this valley of the shadow of death can still feel very treacherous at times. Grief and fear can seem to swallow us, shadows can surround us without and overwhelm us within. But these valleys are fruitful, just as David implies in Psalm 63. We can come to know beauty in the dark and dangerous times, learning to walk through them with our eyes upon God and His glory. Note, too, the walk progresses *through* the valley of the shadow of death; we will not be lost in this valley. Our shepherd promises, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Heb. 13:5). Will you follow your Lord? Will you trust and believe? Will you rest in the comfort of His rod and staff? Follow Him through the valley; there is much to see and learn. What are some of the deep, dark valleys the Lord has walked you through? Are you in one today?

How have your valleys been fruitful?



My Cup Overflows

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

An overflowing cup is one that is full, and more than full. In Christ, we possess that overflowing cup. God has given us everything we need and more. His abundant lovingkindness provides sufficiently for all our needs in life and godliness. As our protector, He anoints our heads with oil (c.f. Eccl. 9:7-8, Lk. 7:46). Although David appears to switch imagery from a shepherd and sheep

to a banquet, it is interesting to note that the anointing imagery still applied well to the shepherd and sheep relationship. In the ancient Near East, a shepherd cared for his sheep individually. During certain seasons, the sheep would be afflicted by flies, mosquitos, fleas, ticks, and other insects. The pests would attack the heads of the sheep, burrowing into their ears and noses. The results could range from irritation to disease and even death. To protect the sheep, the shepherd would make a mixture with olive oil and anoint the head of the sheep, rubbing the oil into its wool especially around its nose, eyes, and ears.⁴ As Christians we may be able to avoid the larger dangers of life only to fall prey to the little things of life that irritate, frustrate, or cause infection. It is the little things that cause many Christians to lose heart, to get discouraged, or to get upset and offended by people.⁵

Where do you need healing and help from the Shepherd of your soul?



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

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you. Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



D o I L o v e G o d w i t h A l l M y H e a r t ?

D A Y F I V E

Over three thousand years ago, God’s spokesperson, Moses, proclaimed this divine imperative: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (Dt. 6:4-5). Almost 1,500 years later, these same words resounded from the lips of God’s only Son, the one and only true mediator between God and all of humanity, Jesus Christ: “*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*” (Mk. 12:30).

Can any of us truly say that we have loved the Lord like this? How can we love like this, especially when our hearts are often distracted, drained, or dry? David knew the source of love, true life, and unlimited refreshment when he cried out to God. He understood that apart from God we are not capable of truly loving anyone, let alone God. The good news of the gospel is that we *are* able to have a personal, life-transforming love relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How is this kind of intimate relationship possible? Through God’s amazing grace, which empowers us to seek after Him in a single-minded, wholly devoted pursuit. As we ask, He will answer; as we seek, He will make Himself known; as we knock, He will open the gateway into a deepening love relationship with Him.



As we pursue a deep and abiding love relationship with the Lord, we will be studying the heart cry of a man, David, who longed after God. David was an ordinary man who intimately knew both his frailty and the unrelenting love of his extraordinary God. He talked with God moment-by-moment, and the Lord inspired many of his heartfelt prayers to teach us through the Psalms. David’s relationship with God is a model of walking with Almighty God, with our hearts knit together in a real and often raw relationship. In his psalms, David opens a door for us to enter the secret place of his unguarded, intimate dialogue with God Most High. As we read these psalms, we learn how David entrusted everything to God—his life and his heart.

Psalm 63 poignantly describes what God did for me as I sought after Him and cried out to Him to be my God. God can do the same for you; seek after Him, asking Him to make the statements in this psalm true of you. What does this psalm say about God's character and actions? Over the next few weeks, we will be studying, praying through, meditating on, and memorizing Psalm 63. Each week, we will explore one or two verses in depth, allowing God's Word to speak to our hearts. Today, we will again read through Psalm 63:1-8 and then pray it to the Lord.

As you read, circle or underline anything that speaks to your heart. Using the words you marked, write your own heart cry to the Lord in the space provided. This is the relationship we want to have with the Lord.

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



There is nothing the Lord Jesus wants more than for us to truly know Him, deeply love Him, and intimately enjoy Him all the more. When this is a reality we will glorify Him. This will not happen overnight, but it is developed over time as we passionately pursue the Lord and consistently invest ourselves in daily devotion to Him. The Lord Jesus set the example for us in meeting with His Father daily for fellowship and guidance.

Remember however, there is nothing the enemy, the Devil, wants to do more than prevent us from pursuing the Lord in His Word. This battle is great! The enemy will do all he can to convince us that there are other "more important" things to do. The busier life becomes, with more demands upon our day, the less time it appears we have to spend with the Lord. Nevertheless, we have a responsibility to stand firm in our commitment to grow in our love for Him. He wants us to walk with Him, side by side, step by step, with our hearts knit to His and His knit to ours, sharing life's moments together, as we glorify Him and enjoy Him in all things.

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

In anticipation of the remainder of the study, I would like to ask you to write out a prayer, in light of all you have read and reflected upon this week, in the space below. Ask the Lord to grant you His grace that enables you to earnestly seek after Him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from today that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, and His life in you. Walk in love and take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

Take a moment to work on your weekly memory verse.



Bring the Truth to Life

DAY SIX

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

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

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

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Looking Back

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

STEP ONE: Take the Truth to Heart

Review the Take the Truth to Heart sections from each day. Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of your faith (Heb. 12:2), and choose one Scripture from the week that the Lord is using to *renew* your mind and *transform* your heart (Rom. 12:2).

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

STEP TWO: Put the Flesh to Death

What sin (wrong thinking or ungodly thought, belief, attitude, action, or inaction) does this Scripture convict you of? Confess this in writing, including an example of where you recognized this sin in your life this week.

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

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

STEP THREE: Bring the Truth to Life

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

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

Remember God's love in the gospel, your death with Christ, His life in you. Walk in love. Take God's Word to heart. Submit to it and humbly live it out.

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



Bring the Truth to Life Chart

This chart is to be filled out on class day.

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. (Jas. 5:16)

NAME	Step One TAKE THE TRUTH TO HEART SCRIPTURE	Step Two PUT THE FLESH TO DEATH SIN	Step Three BRING THE TRUTH TO LIFE ACTION
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Falling in Love Again with Your Lord

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Psalm 63:1

So many Christian women today long to know and love the Lord but don't know how. In this discipleship study, women are taught from God's word what it really means to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. As they journey through David's Psalm 63, women will experience the kind of thirst-quenching relationship the Lord desires to have with them. Many women from many different backgrounds and churches have experienced radical heart and life transformation through this study. Falling In Love Again With Your Lord is, in the words of Dr. Heath Lambert, "robustly biblical, incredibly practical, and urgently needed." Eight lessons (nine weeks with Introduction).

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