

SAMPLE LESSON
NOT FOR RESALE

Heart of a Woman

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY



Focus Scripture

THE PSALMS

Helpful Information

We appreciate your interest in Thistlebend!
Please note that all our studies begin with a “Welcome” section providing an overview of how Thistlebend Discipleship Bible studies are structured. We invite you to visit our website to view the “Welcome” section and additional sample lessons, which are also available to download. You may access our website by using the QR code below. If you have any questions or requests, please fill out the form on our website or email us at info@thistlebend.org.

We look forward to serving you,
The Thistlebend Team





Heart of a Woman

Focus Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24

by Laurie Aker

In Pursuit of Spirit-filled Hearts

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

Proverbs 4:23

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Study

SAMPLE LESSON
NOT FOR RESALE

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A Thistlebend Discipleship Bible Study

Heart of a Woman

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Contents

Welcome

i

LESSON ONE

Planted by Streams of Water

1

LESSON TWO

Preparing to Ask God to Search Your Heart

25

LESSON THREE

I Bow My Knees Before the Father

45

LESSON FOUR

Ask the Father in My Name

65

LESSON FIVE

A Holy Fast: Fasting to Feast

85

LESSON SIX

Repentance: A Posture of Humility

103

LESSON SEVEN

A Victory Garden: Planting Righteousness

123

LESSON EIGHT

A Fruitful Harvest: Ongoing Weeding and Planting

143

APPENDIX

Sample Trees of Unrighteousness and Righteousness, Tools,
Endnotes, Lesson Note Pages, AV Passwords

A1

A decorative rectangular box with a light beige background and a grey border. The background features a repeating pattern of stylized floral and geometric motifs in shades of light blue and beige. The text is centered within this box.

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?*

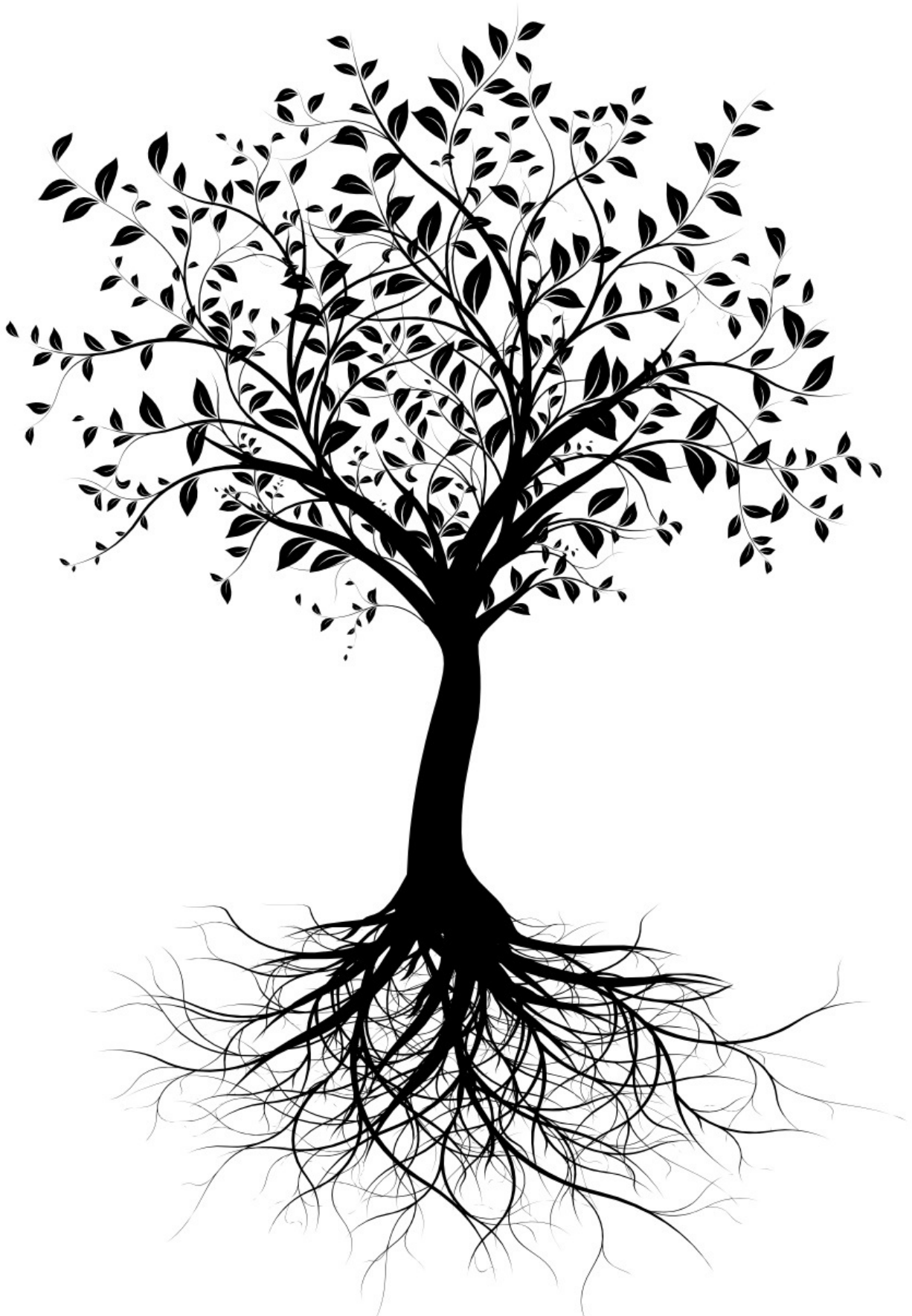
Thistlebend studies are designed for women who want to know Jesus more fully, love Him more deeply, and follow Him more closely. Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner commends, “*The whole aim of Thistlebend: to assist women to love Christ in the practical, nitty-gritty of everyday life.*” Therefore, the nature of 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,

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

Laurie and the Thistlebend Team



Day One

Planted by Streams
of Water

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

Yesterday was a dark, rainy, and foggy day. I was heading to my daughter's home in Chattanooga, driving up the switchback road they call "the W." I was glad to be nearing the end of a long and challenging day of travel. The falling rain, combined with the water spraying up from the freeway, made visibility poor. Tired and anxious to reach my destination, I did not really want to stop at the grocery store, but I just had to pick up a few treats for my granddaughter. Thankfully, there was a parking spot near the door, and I was able to make it into the store without getting drenched. I wandered the unfamiliar store, found what I was looking for, and got in the checkout line. As I reached the counter, the clerk asked, "How are you?"

I replied, "I am great, thank you. How are you?" Her head turned suddenly, and she looked at me with surprise saying, "Really? Even when it has been such an awful, rainy day? How can you be so great on a day like today?" After a quick, silent prayer, I responded that I just arrived from out of town and I was excited about visiting our new grandbaby, our daughter and her husband. I asked her if she was having a difficult day. Handing me my receipt, she sighed, "I'm having a difficult year, a lot of hard things have happened." "What's your name?" I asked, "I'd like to pray for you." "Penny." My phone interrupted our conversation, to the relief of customers held up in line behind me. It was my daughter, Hannah, asking

if I would please pick up some vegetable oil if I had not already left the store. We all laughed, and I headed back to the aisles.

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

The Bible teaches that the joy of the Lord is to be our strength (Neh. 8:10) and we are to "*rejoice in the Lord always*" (Phil. 4:4). I knew painfully well that His joy had not been my strength during those difficult times. The realization was harsh and disturbing. I had gone through many trials before and found myself able to walk forward in joy, knowing His comfort, but this was not the case in my most recent trial. At the time, I desperately longed to be like a tree firmly "*planted by streams of water,*" bearing fruit in season, whose leaves did not wither (Ps. 1:3). However, that was not my response.

I was forced to re-examine my heart, thoughts, priorities, and affections. What was it that I held so dear? I thought I knew my Savior's love for me. I thought He was my all in all. But I was finding out He was not. We think we understand the affections of our hearts, but only the Lord truly knows. In the midst of the trial, I felt as though my life was flashing before me. I was straining to see what I truly stood upon. What was I holding near and dear in my heart? Where did I place my trust? I discovered things hidden in my heart—fear, doubt, anger, and hurt—all of which I had not seen before. Oh, what pain these shrouded, overlooked sins and feelings had caused!

I needed to think through how I might share all of this with Penny. As I found the oil and made my way back to her register, I asked the Lord for guidance to lead to reach out to her in the most effective way. As I paid for my item, I shared

with Penny, “I have encountered some pretty tough times recently in my life as well. Some days are much harder than others! I will pray for you.” I planned to touch base with Penny before I left Signal Mountain. I stopped by again a few days later. She was not at work that day, but I left her a little gift and card sharing my heart for her and told her of God’s love in the gospel.

I do not know what happened next in Penny’s story, but God used our brief conversation in mine. I pondered God’s power to transform His people and thanked Him for the opportunity to share His work in my heart.

When God grants us faith in Christ, He forever changes our hearts. He gives us the Holy Spirit—Himself—and His Son’s inheritance. We receive new hearts that can know joy even in the most difficult circumstances and hearts that desire righteousness, holiness, and truth. When Jesus rescued us, cleansed us, and paid for our sin in full by His blood, not only did His payment cover the penalty of our sin, but He also provided the power to overcome sin—the Holy Spirit. We who were once spiritually dead are now eternally alive with the promise of living in heaven one day without the presence of sin. As if this is not enough, Jesus gives us access to the throne room of God, always and forever, to bring all things before Him. Paul writes, “*How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways*” (Rom. 11:33). May we do everything we can to believe and receive the spiritual blessings given to us in Christ! Regardless of our circumstances our hearts can rejoice as we embrace God’s sovereign and steadfast love in every detail of our lives.

In his first epistle, the apostle Peter exhorts all of us who know God and who are called by Him to get our priorities right, prepare our minds for action, and set our hope fully on Jesus (1 Pt. 1:13). Since God redeems, rescues, and gives us a new hope, we want to be ready to serve Him with unwavering focus. “*Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’*” (1 Pt. 1:13-16). Holiness is what Peter says we are to strive for, yet we find ourselves holding onto or, sometimes, running after worthless things. Pulled by our emotions and desires, discouraged by our weaknesses, and tainted by sin, many of us are easily distracted and diverted away from the pursuit of holiness. On the other

hand, there are those of us who find ourselves caught up in getting all the externals right. Some people may not appear as sinful as others, but we *all* have remaining sin. Oh, yes, we are redeemed, bought by the blood of Christ, but we must overcome our wily flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit. I say “wily” because I know my flesh is beguiling and crafty, and I know that I am not alone! Although redeemed, we are all still profoundly and pervasively imperfect.

The Lord calls us to overcome our remaining sin. However, we are not able to overcome our sin in our strength. Only by trusting in the power and grace that God gives us in the Holy Spirit can we put our sinful flesh to death. This work is a battle. *“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other . . . ”* (Gal. 5:17). In every believer’s heart, there is a constant struggle between the sinful earthly flesh and the Spirit of God within. We are often blind to our flesh as it fiercely resists the truth. Satan creeps up from behind, seeking to rule and reign. Listen to John Owen’s perspective:

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

We want to ask God to give us eyes to see our sinful ways so that we can recognize sin, identify its root, and kill it. Paul instructs us in Ephesians 4:21-24 that *“you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”* We want to turn toward God, draw near to Him, and ask Him to search our hearts.

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

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).

We must be about the work the Lord has called us to do, the working out of our salvation. Paul further says that since we have put off the old self, we now must put off our old ways.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Eph. 4:25-28)

Like weeds in a garden, if we neglect to dig up sin’s roots in our hearts, sin will overtake our hearts and choke the life out of us. The roots of sin sink deep and encircle and cling to the most insidious, distasteful, and worthless things, allowing voracious weeds of sin to spring forth in our hearts. However, if we put the roots of the flesh to death and cultivate the roots of faith in Christ, a color-filled, fragrant, fruitful, and abundant life will begin to blossom and flourish. We are then rooted and established in Love Himself.

Envision a barren wasteland: crusty, dry, unforgiving, uncomfortable, hard, resistant to any kind of growth. Now erase that image and replace it with another: a magnificent garden that seems to extend endlessly in every direction, full of flowers, lush and rich greenery, winding paths, secluded benches, and rippling fountains. No matter which way you journey, you are still in the midst of a world like Eden, bursting with color, fragrance, and beauty. By God’s grace, you want to reflect *this* image in your heart. Allow the Holy Spirit to deeply till the soil within your heart and plant the character of Christ. Meditate on what is true, lovely, and excellent (Phil 4:3). A full, lush garden will bloom within your heart as you put off the old self, repent from your sin, and walk forward in the Spirit. As each area of your heart is tilled, reclaimed, and replanted, your life will pour forth the vibrant

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

Over the coming weeks, please remember that getting to the root of your sins is a lifelong process. When we are in Christ, the Father sees us through Him. We are precious in His sight, and He adores us with a love that is hard to comprehend. Will you choose to believe that He loves you right where you are—imperfect, sinful, but distinctly His? God loves you, not because of your performance, but because of your position in Christ. Be patient and allow Him to lead and do His work, His way.

There are times when the Lord immediately delivers us from the strongholds of sin. However, much of the time, God works slowly and deliberately. His desire is to have a close, intimate relationship with us. He achieves this intimacy by making us dependent upon Him. The Father is looking for your trust and obedience, not your immediate and instantaneous perfection. His Son is perfect and has fulfilled all of the requirements of the law for you. Christ is your righteousness and because He is at work within you, you are able to work out your salvation. It is all part of our heavenly Father’s wise and wonderful plan. He is building a new kingdom in your heart and invites you into this magnificent transformation. Breaking down the old and replacing it with the new is only possible through Him. We want to humbly ask Him for His mercy, wisdom, and grace, trusting in His promise to meet us in our need and answer our request, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him”* (Jas. 1:5).

As you begin this process and the Lord reveals your sin, you may feel more than a little overwhelmed by the sense of your unholiness. Do not be discouraged; although the revelation of sin may feel awful, it is a good thing. Uprooting sin and planting seeds of faith and righteousness is a wonderful and beautiful work you are doing, and the impact is for generations to come. Each time you see your sin, remember to look to Jesus and not dwell inwardly on yourself. See Him as your Savior and your Lord, confess your sin to Him, ask Him for His forgiveness. Hide

yourself in Christ, put all your hope in Him, lean into the power He has given to you in the Holy Spirit and overcome by grace through faith.

Remember, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Hold fast to Christ, recall your salvation and God's great love for you. He loves you now and loved you while you were still a sinner. If you have surrendered your life to Him, it is essential to remember your position in Him. You are no longer who you once were; you are now in Christ. Speak Paul's words out loud to your heart, *"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"* (Gal. 2:20). Blessed is the one who has been rescued, revived, and redeemed! You are a blessed one! You are free from the burden of sin and condemnation. Listen to the psalmist: *"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit"* (Ps. 32:1-2). When you feel particularly discouraged and want to give up, run into the arms of your Savior and Lord. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that *"the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe"* (Prv. 18:10). Practice fixing your eyes upon Him and putting your trust in Him, His mercy, and His grace. Walk forward in Him. This endeavor is well worth your effort because a great harvest lies ahead.

Before you close, consider Penny and her perspective. What is your perspective of your current circumstances? Where have you placed your trust? Does your faith in God and your joy in Him impact how you respond to the sin in your life? Or, can you see the ripple effects of unrepentant indwelling sin pummeling your faith and joy? Take a moment to reflect upon these questions and write your thoughts below. When you are finished, read a powerful, but tender prayer on the following page. Pray through this prayer and close with the praise hymn, "Not in Me."

Memory Passage Reminder

Take a moment to practice your memory verses due for this week.

A PRAYER OF INTENT

Please pray through this prayer that beautifully helps
set the tone for *Heart of a Woman*. May the Lord tune our hearts to His grace.

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

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

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

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

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

We ask that your Spirit would fan the fire of love for you in our hearts. Please don't let us be content with surface level repentance. Let it be deep and let it be real. May we utilize every personal and corporate means of grace at our disposal to love you more. And may our love for you produce a passion to make disciples and proclaim your gospel around this city and around the world. We ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.²

NOT IN ME

By Eric Schumacher & David L. Ward

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Listen to this hymn here: <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/albums/together-for-the-gospel-live-iii/>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Day Two



Blessed One

Psalm 32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

David wrote this psalm. Once a shepherd boy and then a king anointed by God, David is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart. Because of David's wholehearted pursuit after God, it is helpful to observe his psalms carefully. In his psalms, we are also able to observe David's understanding of God, his response to God and His Word, and his relationship with God. In this study, we will have an opportunity to learn from David and other psalmists how to enter into an intimate relationship with the Lord. Prayerfully read Psalm 32. Note your observations below.

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

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

Use Psalm 32 to lead you in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for God's loving provision for you in Christ. Write your prayer below.

Now I would like to turn our attention to Psalm 139, a well-known and beloved psalm. It tells of our everpresent, all-powerful, loving God and His intimate knowledge of us, which offers great hope and comfort in the face of our weaknesses, sins, trials, and difficulties of life. It is the perfect psalm to help us as we seek a greater understanding of our hearts. Observe God's love, knowledge, and care for you. Read Psalm 139 in your Bible, and write your observations below.

Psalm 139

Read verses 23 and 24 again. Write them below.

David asked the Lord to probe deep into his heart. David was well-acquainted with trials, yet he asked to be tested because he desired to have a heart like God's. Notice that the psalmist is asking God to search his heart. David not only asks God to search his heart, but he bravely asks God to try him. He is asking the Lord to bring trials and tests into his life to reveal the reality of his heart. We want follow David's example and ask the Lord to search our hearts. This week and every week during this portion of the study, we are going to pray Psalm 139:23-24 and make it the cry of our hearts.

Why would we ever want the Lord to bring about a trial or a test? Why is this so important? Because God is holy and He commands us to be holy (1 Pt. 1:15-16). John Calvin stated, "Let us aim to make diligent progress in the way of the Lord, and let us not lose heart if we have only a little to show for it. . . . Only let us fix our gaze clearly and directly on the goal."⁴ We no longer want to be controlled by our sinful flesh; we want to be Spirit-filled. We need to make the effort and take the time to observe ourselves and think through these things. The Bible tells us that we are not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds that by testing we may discern God's will. How do we accomplish this? By God's grace! We renew our hearts and minds by taking the truth to heart and God transforms us and makes us more like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Rom. 12:1-2).

He also wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, "*to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph. 4:22-24). Turn to the following page and begin working through the "Take the Truth to Heart" steps.

Take the Truth to Heart

David asked the Lord to probe deep into his heart. He was well acquainted with trials, yet he asked God to test him because he desired to have a heart like His. Every week during this study, we are going to follow David's example and pray Psalm 139:23-24 and make it the cry of our hearts.

Before we go further I want us to prepare our hearts by reading the gospel Scriptures on pages 16-18 of the Appendix. Pause and thank the Lord for His mercy and grace in the gospel.

Step One

Psalm 139:23-24

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Ask the Lord to search you and test you today and throughout the week to reveal any ungodly way in you. The Lord is the tender, loving, and trustworthy Shepherd of our hearts.

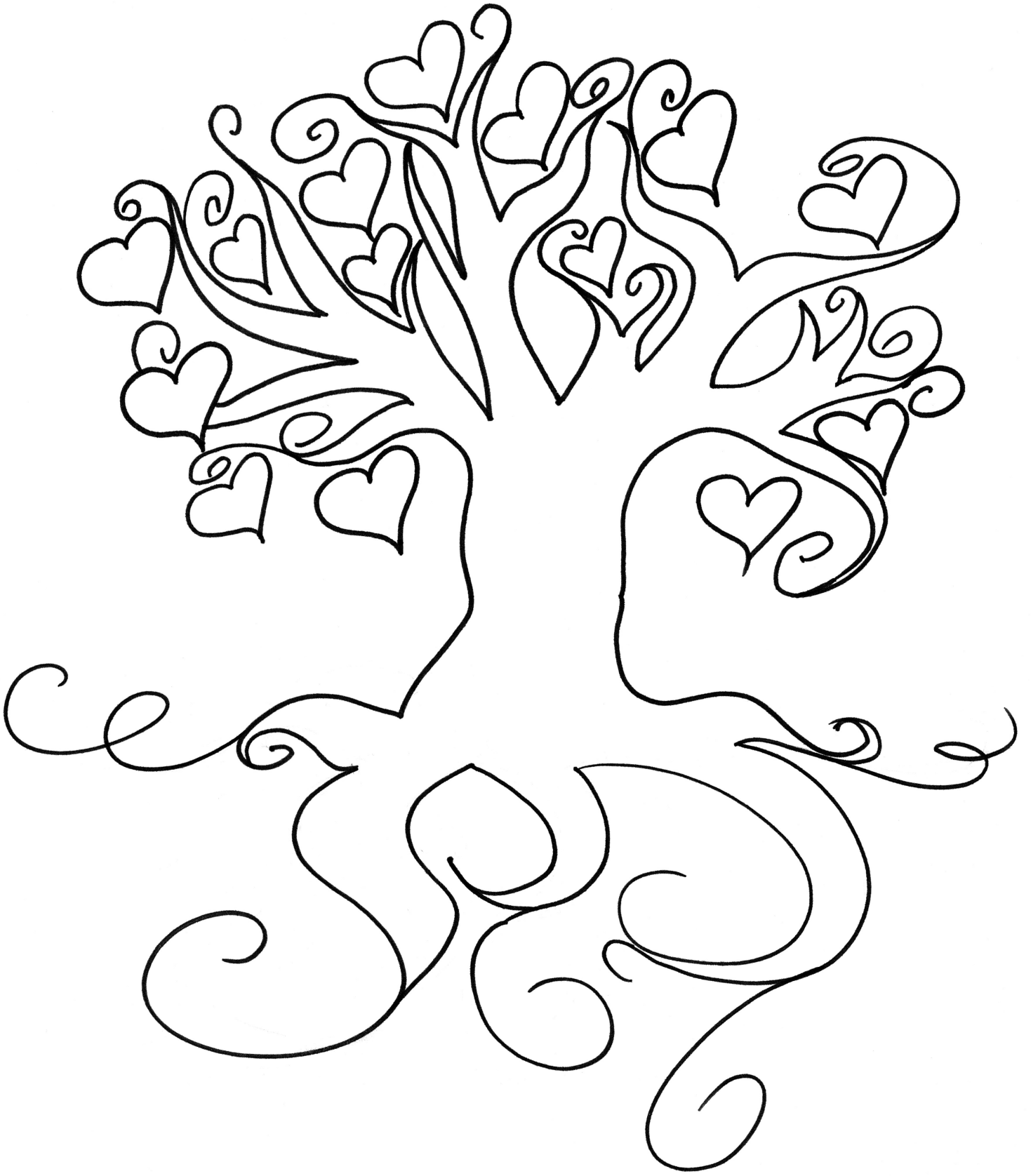
Step Two

Ask the Lord to help you observe your actions and your words i.e., your fruit. Today and each day this week, fill in the hearts (the fruit) of the tree on the opposite page with any ungodly actions and words you observe (see the sample tree of unrighteous fruit in the Appendix on p. A4). Strictly focus on your outward, observable behaviors and spoken words (see a list of examples on pp. A5-A7). At this point we will not write down any of our thoughts or our feelings (we will get to those later).

On class day, during the small group "Bring the Truth to Life" time, each person is asked to share three to four of the sinful fruits on their trees. As you do this, remember there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. James 5:16 says, *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

Memory Passage Reminder

Take a moment to practice your memory verses due for this week.



Day Three



Blessed Is the Woman Who . . .

Psalm 1:1-3

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Read the passage above. Now read the entire Psalm 1 in your Bible. On the facing page, write the answers to the following questions one at a time. What does this passage say the blessed man does not do? What does he do? How does this look in practice? The man who delights in God's law is blessed. What are the results of the actions? Ask the Lord to help you be like the tree planted by streams of water, bearing its fruit in season by walking with God, standing in the Word, and sitting at His feet.

Take the Truth to Heart

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

Memory Passage Reminder

Take a moment to practice your memory verses due for this week.

Day Four



The Lord Is Your Shepherd

Psalm 23:1-4

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.

Read the passage above. Open your Bible and read through the entire Psalm 23. As we walk through the next several weeks, keep this precious psalm in mind. Take a few moments to write on the facing page what this psalm says about your loving and caring Shepherd. As you work through difficult things in the coming weeks, believe these truths hidden in your heart. Pray and thank the Lord for His love and care for you.

Take the Truth to Heart

Jesus is a tender, loving Shepherd. Allow Him to minister to your heart as He leads you on a path that will bring about righteousness in your life. Again, follow the instructions from the “Take the Truth to Heart” section. Lastly, fill in the hearts of your tree on Day Two with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors. Remember there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We are all a work in progress. James 5:16 says, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”*

Memory Passage Reminder

Take a moment to practice your memory verses due for this week.

Day Five



O Lord, Teach Me Your Ways

Psalm 25:1-5

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

Read the passage above. What do you learn from these verses? What is the psalmist asking of God? Write out your answers on the following page. Open your Bible and read through the rest of the beautiful and encouraging Psalm 25. Make a list on the facing page of what you learned about God and about the one who trusts in the Lord. As you close in prayer today, make this psalm your prayer. Pour out your heart to the Lord and ask Him to teach you and lead you.

Take the Truth to Heart

As you do your part of asking God to search your heart, agree with God about your sin and confess it to Him. God will do the work that only He can do as He transforms your heart. He will teach you His ways and His paths. Turn again to the “Take the Truth to Heart” section and follow the instructions. Prayerfully fill in the hearts of your tree with your sinful, outward, and observable behaviors.

Memory Passage Reminder

Take a moment to practice your memory verses due for this week.

Day Six



Bring the Truth to Life

Day Two began the “Take the Truth to Heart” process by asking the Lord to help us observe our actions and our words—our fruit. We were instructed to daily write these unrighteous fruits, sinful actions, and/or words, on the tree. The small group time in class ends each week with the “Bring the Truth to Life” pages. Each person is asked to share the sinful fruit from their trees, again, being always mindful that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

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

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

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

Bring the Truth to Life Chart

(Complete in your small group.)

Name	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit



Heart of a Woman

A THISTLEBEND DISCIPLESHIP STUDY

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

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

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Taking the Gospel to Heart and Bringing It to Life