

# Unfold

Discerning the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart

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For the word of God is living and active,  
sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing  
to the division of soul and spirit, of joints  
and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts  
and intentions of the heart. - Hebrews 4:12



The background is a soft, painterly landscape. The sky is a pale, dusty blue, filled with wispy, white clouds that have a soft, ethereal quality. The ground below is a mix of light pink and pale blue tones, suggesting a misty or dreamlike environment. The overall style is reminiscent of a watercolor or soft oil painting, with gentle transitions and a sense of atmosphere.

# Introduction



**Y**ou know how we love Scripture that is comforting and inspiring, but we are cautious to linger on the parts of the Bible that draw us out of our comfort zone? When was the last time you asked God to purify your heart and to reveal your hidden sins? If we're completely honest with ourselves, we sometimes try to avoid the sharp sting and sobering conviction that follow in the wake of God's penetrating Word. It slices straight through our innermost thoughts to reveal the true intentions within, wounding our pride and igniting a godly grief over our sin. But God's Word is both the sword and the salve. It humbles and heals, renewing our hearts after his holiness.

In the time of ancient Israel, our forebears imagined that the heart was far more than just a blood-pumping, life-sustaining organ in our chest. Instead, they were convinced that the heart was the seat of our intellectual faculties and consciousness—the control center from where we love, feel, think, understand, know, decide, desire, and reason. Despite our modern, biomedical understanding of the heart's

function and discovery of where the brain fits into the equation, the heart continues to be a pervasive symbol for conceptualizing and referring to our inner beings. We break someone's heart when we hurt them; we capture or steal another's heart when we fall in love; we wear our hearts on our sleeves; we say someone has a big heart, is after one's own heart, or is heartless; we search someone's heart to know their intentions; someone's heart can be in the right place, or a sincere apology can come from the heart; our hearts can skip a beat, leap, sink, melt, faint, and become troubled, hardened, gladdened or warmed; moreover, from it flow the springs of life (Proverbs 4:23).

The Bible is very much concerned about the state of our hearts and is overflowing with Scripture on how we can surrender our hearts to God to be renewed daily. The truth is, just as we take care of our bodily hygiene and health by taking a shower, brushing our teeth, and going for regular doctor's appointments, we also need to examine the condition and cleanliness of our hearts to see if anything is hindering our relationship with God or others. And although our salvation is secure, a healthy dose of introspection paves the way for continual repentance and regeneration as Jesus' blood gives us a spiritual shower that restores our joy and freedom.

The chorus of "The Hymn of Joy" perfectly illustrates how our hearts respond to the love of God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

*Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,  
God of glory, Lord of love;*

*Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,  
Praising Thee their sun above.*

Once we were cold and hostile to God, but by grace through faith he gave us clean hearts with a new spirit, exchanging our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19). And like wildflowers open their delicate petals after a long winter, gladly turning to the warm rays of the sun above, our hearts unfold like flowers before Jesus, joyfully turning to the Light of this world. “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

My hope for you is that this devotional will encourage and challenge you to examine the blind spots, hardened edges, and deep crevices of your heart that have gradually grown cold or have never been warmed by the light of Christ. I trust that this study will be like a mirror that reveals your innermost thoughts and intentions, helping you to cultivate a daily practice of repentance as you grow in intimacy with your Savior. It was while I was listening to a modern rendition of Henry van Dyke's aforementioned hymn that God started to place the idea for *Unfold* on my heart one spring. A song of swelling gladness, the joyful lyrics truly capture the heart behind this book. More than any other instruction, the Bible tells us not to be afraid, but to rejoice, praise the Lord, and give thanks always. Along with all of creation, we are invited to exult in God, singing and making melody to him in our hearts—joining a chorus of field and forest, vale and mountain,

blooming meadow, flashing sea, chanting bird, and flowing fountain, to reach a crescendo of delighting in him. In addition to the thread of joy that's woven throughout this study, we will also explore some of the themes observed in the lyrics, like forgiveness, Jesus' victory over sin and sadness, and learning how to love each other.

Drawing from the Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, Paul's epistles, and a plethora of other New Testament Scriptures, *Unfold* will carefully look at what the Bible has to say about our spiritual growth. Trust me when I say I really don't have all the answers, but that's the wonderful thing about God's living Word: he's the one who does the convicting (Hebrews 4:12). This tool's purpose is simply to facilitate and guide you through those heart-penetrating Scriptures so that the Spirit can clean out the clutter of your heart himself. Week 1 kicks off with a crash course on the new heart, the Word of God, and the foundation of repentance, followed by Week 2, which is all about the "Greatest Commandment" (Matthew 22:36-40) to love God and our neighbors. During Week 3 and Week 4, each day's Bible reading will zoom in on a different heart topic—for example: covetousness, gluttony, jealousy, anger, etc.—prompting deeper self-examination. Week 5 will jump straight into the nitty-gritty tension between faith and works, and then we'll come in for the landing with Week 6 by considering the heart's emotional well-being. I included six readings per week to give you breathing room to reflect on each week's content before moving on to the next. You can use the seventh day to rest, to reflect on some of the things that stood out to you, to recap or catch up if you've fallen behind, to read through your personal prayers and journal answers,

or to dedicate that day to focus on your local church or small group readings. Each entry is structured around a repeating “r-pattern” of reading, reflecting, repenting, and finally, rejoicing. This internal design will allow you to unpack Scripture, ponder guided questions to search your heart, write down your prayers, and engage in a time of thanksgiving and worship.

My teenage years were characterized by a work-based faith mentality. I wholeheartedly believed that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and that salvation was a gift that could not be earned, but when I continued reading the rest of the New Testament’s instructions and writings on the renewed, holy life of a Christian, I felt crushed by how impossible it all seemed. Instead of basking in his endless grace and new mercies each morning, I allowed my heart to wallow in sin and condemnation, gradually drifting away from him. But when the fullness of the concept of grace eventually sank in many years later, I started to see how I didn’t have to strive to live a life that is pleasing to God to keep my place as his daughter. It is exactly because I am his that I can seek God daily, confess my sins, and trust that he will continue to wash and renew my heart even if I keep messing up. Although introspection can be painful when it forces you to confront the sin in your life (habitual or otherwise), cultivating a healthy relationship with repentance is of paramount importance in the life of every believer. That is why I wanted to create a devotional that explores what the Bible has to say about our call to holiness. The Bible is not another manual where we simply tick off all the boxes of our good works, but rather a tool that will help you see if your changed life is indeed bearing good fruit and

doing so with a balm of grace. Whether you recently came to Christ or have been a Christian for many years, this book is written for anyone who finds themselves in the interim period between receiving a new heart and waiting to one day receive a new body.

I pray that during these six weeks you will join me in being reminded of God's generous grace and mercy that he has so richly lavished upon us in Jesus—that it will result in a restored joy in your salvation and a renewed desire to weigh your heart against God's Word so that, like David, you too will pray:

“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)!

### **Deeper Reflection**

*Some days include additional reflection prompts and questions to help you take a deeper dive into the Scriptures. I encourage you to flip to the back of the book and prayerfully work through the deeper reflection questions. Some may take longer than others, but do what works best for you—maybe that means splitting it up into a morning and evening read, or even stretching one “day” across multiple days. Go at your own pace and pray for the Holy Spirit's illumination of the Word.*

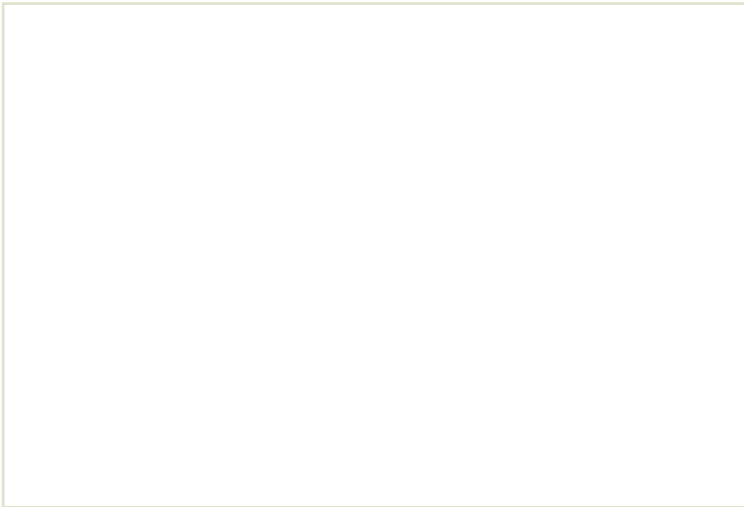


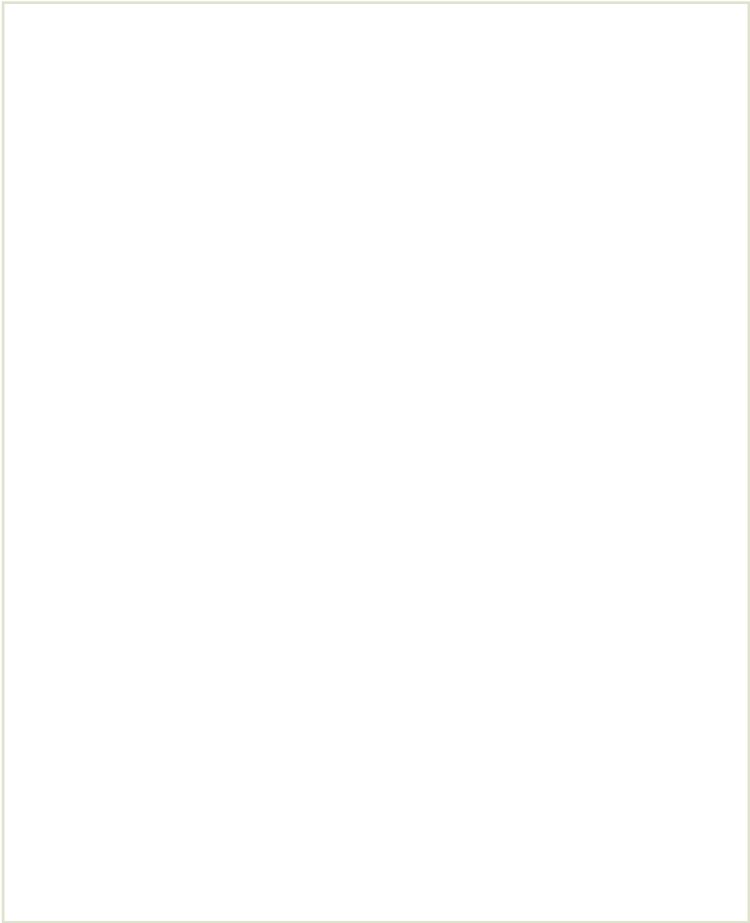




### Heart Check

Before you turn the page to start Week 1 of this study, take a moment to write down what is on your heart. This can be your thoughts, the sin you've been struggling with, or relationships that have been under a strain lately. Basically, write anything that will give you an overview of where your heart is at right now. Are you at peace? Are you troubled? Do you feel far from God? Write it down. Also remember to include today's date next to your inscription. You'll be repeating this journaling step at the end of the sixth week so that you can compare the thoughts of your heart to see how you've grown:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin, light green border, intended for the user to write their journal entry.





*w e e k o n e*

S O W



## Introduction

**W**hen was the last time you looked at yourself in the mirror? I'm not talking about the rushed glance in the hallway mirror to check to see whether you're still wearing your pajama pants before leaving the house or the occasional glimpse of your eyebrows in the rearview mirror. When was the last time you really looked, gazing intently at your face, your eyes searching the portals of your soul in a rare moment of self-awareness? Before we continue, I'd love for you to stand up for a second and have a look at your reflection.

Now that you're well acquainted with your face again, we can jump into the Scripture behind this activity. Proverbs 27:19 tells us that as a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the real person within. I assumed you won't casually have a clear pool of water nearby, so a mirror had to make do to illustrate the point of this proverb: Just as clearly as the mirror reflected your physical appearance, so your heart mirrors the true and authentic version of who you are. It always displays your will, thoughts, desires, intentions, motivations, beliefs,

and emotions to God and reveals itself through your behavior towards others. In this first week, we're going to lay the foundation for the rest of the study. We'll look at how God discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart, what happened to your heart when you first believed in the gospel, the importance of repentance, the blessing of having a pure heart, and how we can take our thoughts captive. I pray that during this week, the Lord will open the eyes of your heart by flooding it with his light (Ephesians 1:18 NLT).

Week One | Day One

## THE WORD OF GOD

*Read: Hebrews 4:12-13 | 1 Corinthians 4:5*

Before we start to explore the true condition of our hearts, we first need to look at the instrument by which our thoughts, intentions, plans, and purposes are revealed: the Word of God. Beginning to understand the full nature of what this title means, however, can be an elusive endeavor resulting in a lifetime of study. And even at the end of it, our minds would simply remain too finite to comprehend the wonderful mysteries and inner workings of God! But let's take a look at what we do know, even if it's just in part.

The most tangible way we usually think about the Word of God is its written form. Today, most of us are fortunate enough to have a bound copy of the Holy Bible, a collection of sixty-six books that have been penned in three different languages by more than forty authors in multiple places over a period of approximately 1500 years. Incorporating numerous genres and narrative styles such as historical and eye-witness accounts, prophetic and wisdom literature, poetry, songs, and letters, this age-old book is miraculously held together by a golden thread that's been woven across millennia to tell one unified story that begins and ends with Jesus. These Scriptures have been written by humans for humans, yet the inerrant words have also been



breathed out and inspired by God, making him the main author who gave life to the Spirit-filled words (2 Timothy 3:16; John 6:63).

Inside the written Word of God, we see the phrases “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord” are interchangeably used to refer to God’s spoken word. We see this when he speaks the cosmos into existence in Genesis 1:1-3 and in how he upholds the universe by the power of his word (Hebrews 1:3). The phrase can also be used to refer to God’s recorded words when he personally addressed Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17), and Moses in the wilderness (Exodus 19:1-3). Moreover, we read that God spoke to his people via the prophets (Hebrews 1:1) who were given divine authority to declare “thus says the Lord.” And everything that took place or was spoken in the past was written down on scrolls as a remembrance, but also as a source of authority as God’s Word. However, the title “Word of God” is most fully afforded to the Son of God, who was the Word from the beginning. We read in John 1:1-18 that the eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us in bodily form as Jesus of Nazareth, and that in the beginning, he was with God—he was God—and through him all things were made. In Revelation 19:13, it says that “he is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.”

The word is Jesus—God incarnate—the Divine Logos and personification of God’s spoken Word who came to fulfill what he inspired people to write about him. That means the written Word is all about Christ. And because everything is about the Son and what he came to accomplish

by fulfilling God's promises, the phrase "word of the Lord" was also used by the apostles to refer to the gospel message of salvation (1 Peter 1:25). As in the "word of God" that was preached to you which is at work in believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13). For "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). And this word of faith is near you, it's in your mouth and in your heart (Romans 10:8).

You see, God's living Word isn't bound to a physical copy of the Bible. The Word of God *is* God. He has always been at work in our world, showing his character and will to his people, and ultimately revealing himself through the Messiah. When God's word goes forth from his mouth, it does not return empty; his word accomplishes all he sends it to do (Isaiah 55:10-11). To summarize, we see that the "Word of God" is a mysterious combination of words written by Spirit-inspired men, God's spoken word in decrees, personal addresses, and through the prophets, the Word made flesh, and the Word as the good news of the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then by implication, when we read a verse from the Bible or hear the gospel proclaimed, it is as if Jesus himself has leapt off the pages and is probing our hearts and working within them. That brings me to the most critical observation about the Word for the theme of this book. The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). Not only is the Word living and active, but it also knows us through and through (Hebrews 4:12-13). Two-edged swords were filed on both sides to produce a penetrating blade that could slice through almost

any armor. The author of Hebrews tells us like a two-edged sword, the Word is sharp, piercing, and deeply discerning. It convicts and uncovers the whole mind and will of our hearts to the all-seeing eyes of our Creator. We are all naked and exposed before the One to whom we must give account, and when Jesus the Word of God returns to judge, a sharp two-edged sword protruding from his mouth, he will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart (Revelation 1:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

There are plenty of reasons why regularly reading the written Word of God in the Scriptures is crucial for the Christian life. Just before Jesus' betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, he earnestly prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). The Word is instrumental in sanctifying our hearts—i.e., the life-long process whereby we become holy and more like Christ—and is a treasure trove of timeless truth. If we abide in it, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free (John 8:32). The writings of the Bible allow us to intimately know the God we serve as we learn more about his character in different contexts throughout redemptive history. It is filled with wisdom that feeds and nourishes our souls, guiding us through life like a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the [child] of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Furthermore, between the enduring pages of the Bible, we can find grace, peace, love, joy, and plenty of hope, and when we spend time delighting in and meditating on its life-giving

words, we are like trees planted by streams of water that yield their fruit in season (Psalm 1:3).

Now read Psalm 119:9-16.

Echoing Jesus' plea to the Father to purify our hearts in truth, the psalmist recognizes that we can only keep our way pure when we guard it according to his Word. As we go about our days hoping for Jesus' glorious return, it is our aim and our charge to live holy lives by seeking God with our whole heart and storing up his Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against him. That means both studying and memorizing the Bible and listening to the conviction of God's Word that is written on the tablets of your heart through the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). Charles Spurgeon once wisely said, "Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years." May we prize God's Word as our most treasured possession and allow its sharp scrutiny to search our hearts continually.



## **Repent**

*Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Revelation 3:19*

Did the Spirit convict you of anything in your heart while you were reading today's devotional? Write down your prayer, confessing any sin you want to surrender to God.

## **Rejoice**

*Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!*  
*1 Chronicles 16:10*

Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Take a moment to praise God that you can find encouragement and hope in the Bible! Give thanks to the Lord that, by his divine wisdom, his time-tested Word has been preserved through the ages to find its place in your home.

Week One | Day Two

## SCATTERED SEEDS

*Read: Luke 8:4-15 | 1 Peter 1:22-25*

For a few short weeks every spring, the usually dry and arid region of Namaqualand on South Africa's West Coast is transformed into lush acres of brightly colored blooms. As if a master painter had decided to add every color on his palette to a desert landscape, the Flower Route becomes a sea of reds, oranges, yellows, blues, pinks, purples, and whites, attracting visitors from far and wide. After the wildflowers retreat from the public eye, they set seed, waiting to be drenched in next year's winter rainfall before starting their explosion of color all over again. South Africans also bring the little flowers closer to home by buying the most popular Namaqualand daisies as a packet of seeds at a nursery. My mom, who was born with a shovel and a plant in her hands, once bought one of those packets and decided to sprinkle it over the ground in our garden to see how many of the seeds would come up. Some were blown away by a strong southeaster, and more still were picked up by the guinea fowl that came to comb through the soil. Only a small handful of what was originally sown ended up blooming that year. So, as the dainty assortment of daisies made a welcome appearance in our garden that spring, I couldn't help but be reminded of the parable of the sower.

When a crowd began to gather around Jesus, he shared a simple story of a sower who went out to sow some seeds. In his parable, the seed is the Word of God, and the different kinds of soil are the various conditions of people's hearts. After the sower scattered the seeds, they fell on these four surfaces:

**Some fell along the path and were trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it.**

*Who are they? Those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.*

**Some fell on rocky ground, and as it grew up, it withered away in the sun, because it had no root or moisture.**

*Who are they? Those who, when they hear the Word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a little while, and in time of testing or persecution fall away.*

**Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it.**

*Who are they? Those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and the pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.*

**Some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.**

*Who are they? Those who, hearing the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*



We all want to be the fertile soil that holds fast to God's Word in good and honest hearts, bearing fruit with patience. But if we're completely honest with ourselves, more often than not, we allow the daily thorns of the desires, distractions, and pleasures of life to choke our obedience to Christ. Whichever one of these groups best represents your heart today, I want to encourage you to dig deep into the Founder of your faith by being rooted in Jesus. If you seek him, you will find him, and he will nourish and sustain you with living water. Don't make the mistake of going on your way without the Lord. It will only open doors to weeds and thorns that will smother your desire to live for him. But when you cling to the Word, you tap into an endless supply of grace to help you spiritually grow and endure with patience. In 1 Peter 1:22-25, it says that when the living and abiding Word of God—that is, the good news of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ—was preached to you, you were born again of imperishable seed, for “the word of the Lord remains forever.” In response, you are called to purify your soul by being obedient to the truth, the outflow of which is loving God and others earnestly from a pure heart.



## **Repent**

*So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. Mark 6:12*

Spend some time in prayer and ask God to change the soil of your heart by implanting it with his Word. Pray for faith, patience, and endurance, and ask him to show you which earthly distractions are keeping you from bearing mature fruit.

### **Rejoice**

*Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD,  
O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name! Psalm 97:11-12*

Give thanks to God that he made a way for the good news of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ to be preached to you. Pray and ask that he will help you to scatter these seeds everywhere you go.



Week One | Day Three

## A NEW CREATION

*Read: Jeremiah 17:9-10 | Jeremiah 31:31-34 | Ezekiel 11:19-20 |*

*2 Corinthians 5:17 | Ephesians 4:17-24*

When the Word of God fell on the fertile soil of your heart, it sprouted and brought about a life-changing transformation. You received a spiritual heart transplant. But what exactly does that mean, and why is it significant?

Ever since the fall in Genesis 3, when sin entered into the world, the deceitful human heart has been made desperately sick—even beyond cure (Jeremiah 17:9). From then on, everything spiraled out of control and “every intention of the thoughts of [the] heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The created rejected the Creator. Like stubborn sheep that have gone astray after their own selfish ways, humans kept turning their backs on the Lord, choosing idols over the living God (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 1:24-25). Although the Lord intervened by making a covenant with Israel in the wilderness, giving them stone tablets of the Law by which to live, their hostile hearts could never submit to God’s perfect will, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Not only is the Law holy, righteous, and good, but it also showed us that we could never be justified by our own efforts (i.e., being made in right standing with God), “since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

Even if we try to tick all the boxes of living a morally good life, we'd only come face to face with our shortcomings. It demonstrates how desperately we need a perfect Savior to intercede on our behalf and do something about our poisonous hearts. Thankfully, throughout millennia, God continued to choreograph a divine plan of reconciling our darkened hearts to himself. He sent Jesus—the Son of God—to live a perfect life, die a sinless, sacrificial death, and pay the price for our sins on our behalf. After three days in the grave, he rose to life and physically ascended to heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of the Father until he will return to judge the living and the dead. In Jesus, every plan, purpose, and promise of God is fulfilled. With his perfectly pure and holy heart, Christ fulfilled the Law and made a way for us to have a restored relationship with God. And it is this glorious gospel message of salvation that, when preached to ears that are willing to hear, gives them a new heart and a new spirit.

Romans 10:9-10 says that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” If you truly believe, repent from your sin, and confess the above, you are declared righteous and have received the free gift of grace and forgiveness through faith. You'll recall that God required the Israelite males to undergo circumcision as an outward symbol of their allegiance to the first covenant. In the same way, the Bible uses the somewhat graphic image of circumcision to describe what takes place when you enter into the New Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4). The

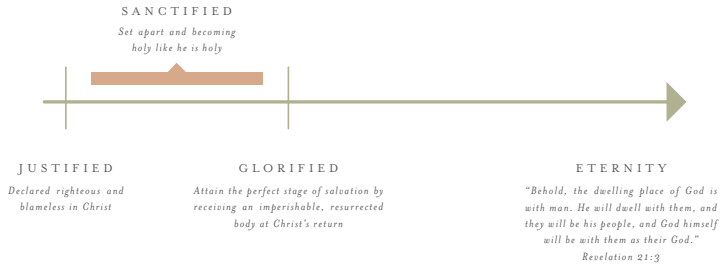
metaphoric foreskin of your heart has been cut off by the Holy Spirit who dwells inside of you, turning your old, hostile heart of stone into a soft heart of flesh (John 14:17; Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11). God removed the veil that covered your heart (2 Corinthians 3:16). More than that, he wrote his law of love on the very tablets of your heart (i.e., the innate conviction of spiritual truth), enabling you to adore and obey him by the power of the Spirit.

Let that sink in. You can know him, the One True God. You are not an imposter. You are forever his, and he is forever yours. The God who made you has chosen to freely forgive all your sins (Jeremiah 31:34). And not only that, he also said that he will remember it no more! As far as the east is from the west, so far did he remove your transgressions from you (Psalm 103:12). Though your sins were red like scarlet and crimson, they were made white as snow and wool (Isaiah 1:18). You have been washed clean by the blood of the Passover Lamb. You are a new creation in Christ, “the old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). And now, having been born again, the second time around being a spiritual rebirth into the family of God, you can be alive in Christ and walk in newness of life (John 3:5-6; Romans 6:4).

According to Paul, your new life is to be characterized by “putting off the old self”—your former habits, hardness of heart, and “deceitful desires” like sensuality, greed, callousness, and impurity (Ephesians 4:17-22). Once you’ve stripped away your old manner of life before you knew Jesus, you can start to put on the new self which has been



“created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). We call it sanctification, the lifelong process of being conformed to the image of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible uses both the complete and ongoing forms of the verb in that we have been sanctified, meaning you have been set apart for God as a saint, and are being sanctified by gradually becoming more like Jesus (Hebrews 10:10-15). This will ultimately come to completion when you receive a new body to go along with your new heart during the glorious resurrection at Jesus’ return (I Corinthians 15:42-44). I like to think of the stages of a Christian’s life like this:



The thing about a heart transplant is that you can't perform one on yourself. No number of self-help rituals or self-improvement manuals will bring about lasting spiritual change. God, the Great Physician, is the only one who can renew your thoughts, desires, affections, motivations, and intentions. And it is his Spirit that empowers you to put on the new self and to love him from a pure, soft, unfolded heart.



4. *Do you still carry the weight of shame and guilt from before your salvation? What are the implications of being a new creation in Christ?*

### Repent

*“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:32*

Throughout the Bible, people who remain prideful, arrogant, unrepentant, and disbelieving are described in terms of their “hardness of heart.” Israel’s hardened hearts especially served as a warning and challenge to us not to react in the same way (Hebrews 3:7-11). And in Mark 8:17-21, we even see that Jesus rebuked the disciples for the hardness of their hearts when they worried how they would feed the multitudes the second time. They were so quick to forget that Jesus already multiplied the bread and fish once; why wouldn’t he do it again? A hard heart has the inability to remember what God has done or to hope and have faith that he would do it again. And in addition to the lack of faith of an “unbelieving heart,” our hearts can also be hardened by “the deceitfulness of sin” that forms a wedge between our fellowship with him (Hebrews 3:12-13). Is there any deliberate, ongoing sin in your life that you need to repent of? Pray and ask God to reveal this to you and repent.

Without Jesus we would all be dead in our trespasses, stuck with deceitful, incurable, hard hearts of stone. But out of his great mercy, God softens our hearts to open up to his love and light. When we abide in Jesus, he will continue to have mercy on us and sanctify us just as he did with the disciples who also struggled. Today, be honest with yourself about the condition of your heart. Is it hard, disbelieving, and unrepentant? Or have you opened up to the Lord in faith, surrendering your whole heart to him to renew and cleanse you?

### **R e j o i c e**

*But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" Psalm 40:16*

Praise God that your heart unfolded like a flower, turning to him as to the sun above. Spend some time in prayer and contemplation, remembering the condition of your heart before and after Christ gave you a new one and thanking God for his forgiveness.



Week One | Day Four

## CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

*Read: Psalm 51 | 2 Corinthians 7:8-11 | 1 John 1:8-10*

Depending on whether or not you grew up in the church, repentance can sometimes be a big, scary word that stirs up memories of stern scowls and hard wooden benches. But the Bible tells us that it holds the key to getting rid of our burdens and basking in the freedom of forgiveness. So, what exactly does it mean to repent?

Repentance is the contrite feeling of regret, sorrow, and remorse for your past conduct, coupled with the deliberate act of turning away from your sin and turning towards God. This one-eighty turn around is characterized by obedience and humility as you return to the Lord and draw near to him in surrender. Fundamentally, it is the catalyst or the starting point of our faith and the very first thing Jesus preached when he began his ministry: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). But if we fail to see how we’ve broken God’s moral law, we don’t think we have anything to repent from. As such, the first requirement of repentance is that we recognize we are sinners in need of a Savior, and then to believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the solution for our sin.

In Acts 3:19-20, after Peter shared the gospel with a crowd of onlookers in Jerusalem, he told them to repent and turn back so that

their sins may be blotted out, and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Dear friend, doesn't that sound so inviting? Refreshment means the giving of fresh strength and energy. It renews, revives, and regenerates the heart, giving you new vigor to fight the good fight of faith. Like finding a cold mountain stream after weeks in a desert wasteland, repentance refreshes your languishing soul, strengthening you for the journey ahead. Like sinking into fresh sheets, stepping out of a shower, and venting a house, repentance does the hygienic upkeep of our hearts. It pushes the reset button, washing and scrubbing every inch until it's spotless and clean.

Sometimes when we wander down the back roads, chasing things that bring temporary happiness and escapist thrills, we waste so much time by allowing our stubbornness and guilt to keep us from returning to God. The beautiful truth is that though you might feel like you've passed the point of no return, when you make that U-turn and go home to your Father, I promise he'll be standing with arms wide, welcoming you back into the fold. When the blessed assurance of mercy is patiently waiting for you to turn back and be grieved by your sin, it causes a "godly grief [which] produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). It's the type of grief that makes you run to God for healing, comfort, and restoration and not the world. We see the difference between worldly and godly grief in the post-sin behavior of Peter and Judas. After denying Jesus three times, Peter was deeply distraught and remorseful, but despite his sin, he clung to the cross of forgiveness and went on to walk in obedience to God's calling. Judas, on the other hand, did not find grace for

his guilt. The traitor tried to fix things by himself by giving back the blood money and eventually hanging himself. His refusal to repent by casting himself at the mercy of God showed that he harbored only a worldly grief for sin which leads to death.

As a Christian, you never graduate from asking God to create in you a clean heart and to realign you with the Holy Spirit within you (Psalm 51:10). After your initial repentance in your saving conversion to faith in Christ, you will unfortunately sin every day in various ways. That's why when Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, he included the line "and forgive us our debts . . ." (Matthew 6:12). This isn't because you need to be justified daily. Your salvation remains secure; you have received a new heart once and for all. But it does show how ongoing repentance restores your personal fellowship and relationship with God and others. If we don't turn away from sin, how will we grow and mature in godliness? Didn't Peter say we should be "diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:14)? Therefore, repentance is meant to be cultivated into a daily practice of recognizing your sin through the internal conviction of the Spirit, when hearing or reading the Word of God, or upon a friend's rebuke, confessing it to God in prayer, and then asking for his forgiveness and cleansing. Even if it's much easier to ignore your sin and feign ignorance, surrendering your whole heart to God in prayer (including the good, the bad and the ugly) will over time yield more fruit as it allows you to grow in grace.



As God realigns your thoughts and desires to want to know and please him more, you will come to appreciate the freedom that comes from including confession and a prayer of repentance in your quiet time. Wherever you are on your walk with the Lord, remind yourself of these spiritual truths:

- *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He doesn't condemn you, get angry at you, or treat you according to your mistakes and failures (Psalm 103:8-9). Jesus extended never-ending mercy and forgiveness by taking all your sin (past, present, and future) upon himself on that cross. Christ's single sacrifice for sin once for all time has secured salvation for all those who are being sanctified, including you (Hebrews 10:14). Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).*
- *The Son and the Spirit are interceding for you (Romans 8:27, 33-34).*
- *Jesus understands what you're going through. He can sympathize with your weakness because he himself has been tempted in every way yet remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Draw near to him and tell him about your struggles; he truly gets it.*
- *You are called to produce fruit in keeping with repentance (see Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20). After treating the woman caught in the act of adultery with compassion and grace, Jesus didn't condemn her, but he did tell her to "go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). You don't have to be enslaved by your sin. Jesus unlocks the shackles*

and gives you freedom. But he also calls you to holiness. Even if you have repented in your heart, your life should also show the transformation within.

- *God disciplines you because he loves you and you are his child* (Hebrews 12:5-11). “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”



## Repent

*Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Acts 3:19-20*

Our sin should grieve us into rendering “a broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17) to the Lord in surrender. In the same book mentioned in question three, Watson wrote, “We are to find as much bitterness in weeping for sin as ever we found sweetness in committing it. Surely David found more bitterness in repentance than ever he found comfort in Bathsheba.” Psalm 51 is one of the seven Penitential Psalms or Psalms of Confession, so named for their repentant expression of sorrow for sin. David penned this poignant song of prayer after the prophet Nathan called him out for committing adultery with Bathsheba and arranging the murder of her husband. The subsequent conviction of his sins led David to write this personal plea to the Father, but it was also publicly used to stir up the congregation to join in a time of examining their own hearts through corporate confession. Personally, it remains one of my favorite psalms as it always gives me the right words to pray to God when I’ve messed up.

- First, reread the psalm out loud while imagining your own heart being laid bare before God.
- Next, write your own personal prayer of confession by drawing on the words of David to help form your thoughts.

## **Rejoice**

*O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. Psalm 51:15*

Watson concluded that, “never do the flowers of grace grow more than after a shower of repentant tears” and I couldn’t agree more. Have you noticed how David was looking towards the joy that would come after the difficult process of repentance in verses 8 and 12 of Psalm 51? He earnestly prayed that God would restore in him the joy of his salvation and that he will hear joy and gladness again. Give thanks to God for his steadfast love towards you and ask him to restore your joy in your salvation. Let that overflow into a time of praise and worship as you find refreshment in the presence of the Lord.

Week One | Day Five

## FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

*Read: Psalm 32 | Matthew 5:2-12*

Psalm 32 is another one of the seven Penitential Psalms, but in contrast to David's contrite words in yesterday's psalm, he now joyfully gives thanks to God for the forgiveness of his sins: "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the [person] against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (v.1-2). Paul cited David's words in his letter to the Romans, saying that the blessing in the first two verses is for those whose righteousness is counted apart from their works (those who have been justified by grace through faith [Romans 4:5-8]). That's us! How gracious and merciful is our God? He melted the clouds of sin and sadness. Your shame and guilt are gone. You are forgiven, accepted, redeemed, and free. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). And absolutely nothing you do will make you more righteous than you are right now, because it was never a righteousness of your own to begin with.

I love how verses 3-4 of Psalm 32 show how David's strength dried up when he avoided God and refused to confess his sin, and how verse 5 shows God's quick response of forgiveness and restoration the moment David acknowledged his sin and stopped trying to hide it. Aren't you and I exactly the same? Let us stop delaying the inevitable

by offering prayer to God at a time that he may be found (Psalm 32:6). Nonetheless, God's steadfast love surrounds us, enveloping us in a sea of forgiveness as he pours out blessing upon blessing. The pronouncement of blessings continued all the way from David's psalm into the New Testament when Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes. Although I'd love to deep dive into all nine blessings, we're only going to pause on one today:

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).*

To see God is a very big deal. In the Old Testament, Moses was told to hide in a cleft of the rock on the mountain until God's glory had passed by, because being in his holy presence would simply consume any human nearby (Exodus 33:20-23). Likewise, Manoah the father of Samson had such a reverent fear of the Lord after meeting with the Angel of the LORD that he exclaimed, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). Jesus' statement that the pure in heart will see God isn't just a pretty verse for a coffee mug or cell phone background; it is a profound declaration of the gospel, of people receiving new and pure hearts so that they can see God and live. This makes Jesus' words to Philip all the more amazing: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9 NIV). When Jesus walked this earth, people could see God face to face in the form of a man.

But let's return to the Beatitude. What is important to note here is that Jesus wanted to emphasize how he looks at the heart, and not the outward appearance of people like we are prone to do (1 Samuel 16:7). He sees us for who we really are. Those who are pure in heart

love God wholeheartedly and live lives that are in perfect alignment and harmony with his will. With that said, we also know that we fall short of his perfection and that we need to rely on God to cleanse our hearts, hence, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Through Jesus, we can boldly come to God with our prayers and petitions. He isn’t an angry dad or a schoolteacher who is looking for every opportunity to scold you. He loves you. You are his child. Seek him, trust him, rejoice in him and he will purify your heart. If you seek the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul, you will find him (Deuteronomy 4:29). Scripture also tells us that if God metaphorically doesn’t hide his face from you, he is gracious to you, and you are in his favor (Psalm 27:7-9).

The Hebrew term for a ‘pure heart’ (*lev shalem*), can be broken up into the constituents *lev* (heart) and *shalem* (root form of peace). Therefore, to have a pure or whole and perfect heart literally means to have full peace. This peace with God comes from Jesus—the Prince of Peace: the Founder and Perfecter of our faith. And when our faith becomes sight, we will finally see him face to face and become like him (1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 13:12). There will come a day when God himself will dwell among us and we will see him (Revelation 22:4). Until then, we strive by faith and fear for “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14; 2 Corinthians 7:1). We also ask God to open our eyes to the ways we can see him in part in the present. For example, we can see God when we recognize his good gifts and provision in our lives, or when we behold the splendor and beauty of his creation in a sunset or a waterfall, or when we see





**Repent**

Is there anything in your heart that is keeping you from experiencing “full peace” (*lev shalem*) today? Write down your personal prayer of repentance:

### **Rejoice**

*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! Psalm 32:11*

The end of Psalm 32 gives us a blueprint of the joy and adoration that God's blessing should evoke in us. Close today's quiet time by putting on a couple of worship songs and lifting your voice in praise. There is reason to be glad and to shout for joy today!





Week One | Day Six

## TRY ME AND KNOW MY THOUGHTS

*Read: Psalm 139 | 1 Chronicles 28:9 | Romans 12:2 | Philippians 4:8*

Now that we've explored what happens when the Word of God falls on the fertile soil of people's hearts, the repentance and regeneration that follow, and the blessing of being able to know God through Christ, we'll consider the "thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

You know when you're driving in the car, loudly singing along to your favorite songs, but then you need to find a parking space and you suddenly have to turn down the volume to 'see' better? Or when you're watching a scary movie on mute, realizing that without a suspenseful backtrack the horror scene quickly turns into a silly spectacle? Sometimes our minds work a little like that—an endless stream of consciousness that flows through our heads like a chaotic symphony. Some thoughts linger and overstay their welcome while others disappear before being fully processed. But most of the time we're just cruising along without taking stock of all the ideas, hopes, lies, fears, assumptions, ambitions, opinions, and musings that run around the hamster wheel. Yet sometimes we need to slow down and think, to focus on what really goes on inside of our heads and hearts. We turn down the volume. And when the backtrack of our minds is on

mute, it gives us greater clarity so that we can see the things that aren't quite as horrible as they first appeared.

*I'm not good enough. I could be doing more. No one sees me. I don't have my life together. If only I could be like "X." How could she wear that to church? What if something happens to my family? What if Christianity isn't true?* Pay attention to your inner monologue. What are the thoughts that flit in and out of your head daily? Are they helpful? Are they even true? Whether you're a chronic worrier, struggling with low self-esteem or comparison, silently judging people, or dodging questions of doubt, your mind can quickly become a scary place if not submitted to God's Word and will. Paul taught that part of putting on the new self is being renewed in the spirit of your mind (Ephesians 4:23). In other words, you are called not to conform to this world and its way of viewing things, but to be "transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). God not only gives us new hearts, but he also renews our thought patterns so that we can have a Kingdom-focused mindset. We foster this process of rewiring our neurological pathways by intentionally thinking about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). And what better way to do this than to meditate on the Word of God every day and night?

Martin Luther said, "You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair." You can't control the thoughts that pop into your mind,

but you don't have to dwell on them and give them the headspace to fester and grow. Our intentions (our plans and purposes) are largely shaped by our thoughts and can easily lead to the wrong actions if not kept in check. By taking every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), you can single it out from the noise and actively weigh it against God's Word so that you can discern what is worthy of your attention. Over time, as you study and memorize the Bible, you'll learn to identify what is your own voice, what is the conviction and correction of the Holy Spirit, and what are lies or temptations from the enemy. The latter's whispers want to distract and disable you, but when you marinate your mind in spiritual truth and surround yourself with godly people, you'll gradually grow more attuned to the backtrack of your brain and how to guard it with vigilance.

David wisely told his son Solomon to know God and serve him with his whole heart and a willing mind, "for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought" (1 Chronicles 28:9). His Psalm 139 paints a beautiful picture of the intimacy with which God searches your heart. God knows you inside and out. He knows when you sit down and when you stand up. He discerns your thoughts before they are fully formed and knows what you are going to say even before the words are in your mouth. He sees every secret thing, even the deepest recesses of your mind, your biases, darkest secrets, resentful feelings, innermost sorrows, silent prayers, and frustrating angers. As naked and exposed as that might make you feel, it's also reassuring that God knows you better than you even know yourself. And despite seeing you at your worst, he still chooses to love you!



How would your friends see you if they knew the full condition of your heart? If they saw every thought, attitude, or unspoken word? The truth is, although it's frightening to be laid bare before the mighty El Roi—The God Who Sees Me—it's also freeing to know that the one who knitted you together in your mother's womb is so intimately acquainted with all your ways. From the day you were born to the day you will breathe your very last, every second is written in his Book of Life. He chose you to be his child before the foundation of the world and you'll spend eternity with the God of the universe who made the towering mountains and the roaring oceans, but also orchestrated every minute detail in your life to lead you to himself. Let us serve this mighty God with willing minds, submitting every thought and plan to his Word.

### Reflect

*Flip to the "Deeper Reflection" section at the back of the book for additional reflection questions.*

1. *Think back to when you first gave your heart to Jesus. How much has he changed your thinking patterns and world views since then.*

2. *What music, series, social media, and people are you filling your thoughts with? Would you say that any of those are having a detrimental effect? How can you practically cut some of those voices out? E.g., unfollowing certain pages, doing a digital fast, etc.*

### **Repent**

Write down your personal prayer using Psalm 139:23-24 as a starting point. Ask God to drive out any impure thoughts and to direct your mind towards things that are good and godly.

### **Rejoice**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Philippians 4:4*

Round off today's quiet time by focusing your mind solely on God in praise and worship.



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