


A painterly illustration of a forest scene. In the foreground, a stream flows from the left towards the center, its surface reflecting the surrounding greenery. A small, rustic stone bridge crosses the stream in the middle ground. The banks are covered in lush green grass and foliage. Large, leafy trees frame the scene, with their branches and leaves hanging over the water and the bridge. The overall style is soft and impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, natural color palette dominated by greens and browns.

Unfold

Discerning the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart

Liesl Lamprecht



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 painting of a vast, hazy landscape. The sky is filled with soft, white and grey clouds against a pale blue background. The horizon is low, showing rolling hills and fields in muted tones of blue, green, and pink. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

Introduction



You 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.¹ 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"² 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)!

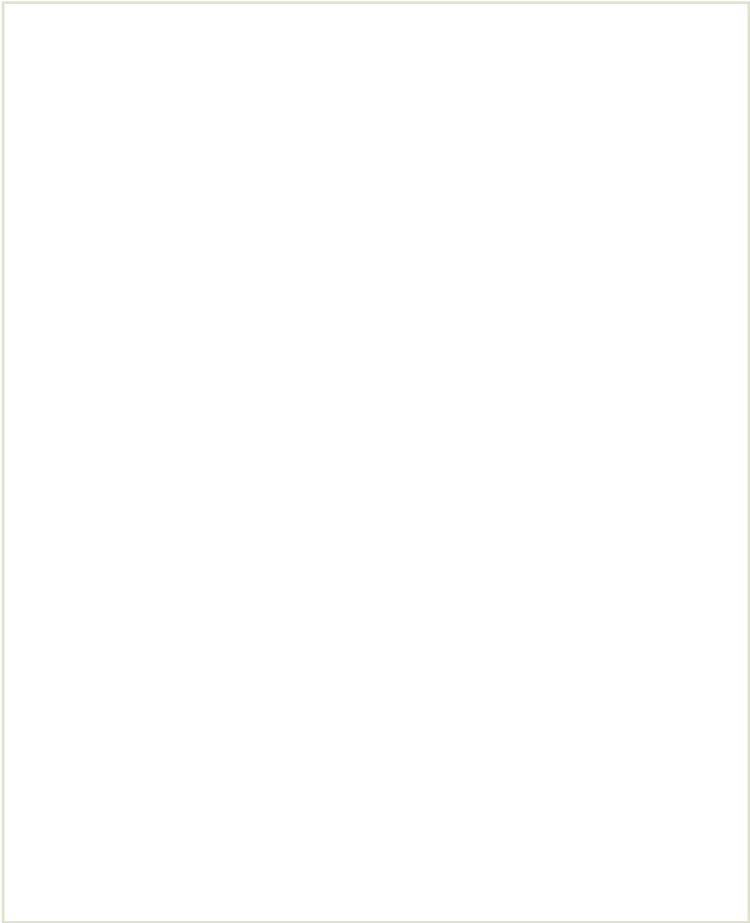
Deeper Reflection

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 'Heart Check' journal entry.





w e e k o n e

S O W



Introduction

When 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."³ 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.

Loving *Unfold*?
Buy the full study here.

