



Christmas Hearts

by Kelly Dixon

**A study of the hearts of those
God chose to be a part of Jesus' birth.**

Introduction

Thanksgiving family plans were being reconciled in my mind when I looked up to see my first glimpse of Christmas for the year. Immediately my mind went to the crazy commercialized world that can't even give thanks to the Lord before starting the Christmas market. For stores, Thanksgiving is just the day right before the first Christmas money making day. Even Thanksgiving Day has now been infringed upon as stores are beginning to open their doors for shoppers. It is a repulsive thought that saddens me as I see our Lord and Savior gradually being taken more and more out of focus. However, as a determined Christian who wants more of the Lord in my life, I choose to have a heart that seeks the Lord.

In my studies of God's Word, I have admired many times the hearts of those who play such important roles in the earthly birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Mary has always been one that I admired and just recently I have admired the heart of Joseph. The Lord laid on my heart and encouraged me through other Christians to write this four week study on the hearts of those He chose to be a part of Jesus' birth. It is my hope that we will gather glimpses of what it is like to seek the Lord during all of the Christmas seasons in our lives instead of seeking ourselves or even seeking to please those around us. So grab that cup of hot cocoa and your Bible. As we seek the Lord, He will reveal to us the heart He desires for us.

Your Sister and Fellow Servant of Christ,

Kelly Dixon



Kelly Dixon, Author and Motivational Speaker

Kelly Dixon is an author and motivational speaker whose desire is to inspire you to draw closer to Jesus. She loves to share God's Word so that others not only learn it but experience it deeply. She teaches in a clear, precise, and concise way so that you understand what it means to "deepen your walk with Jesus." Having received and accepted the call to motivate other Christian women toward a deeper relationship with Christ, she began the Ladies for Jesus ministry; a ministry of many ladies who love the Lord and share in this desire. Kelly is married to Kermit Dixon, and they have two beautiful girls.

Table of Contents

Mary's Submissive Heart	pg. 2
Joseph's Heart of Compassion	pg. 6
The Shepherds' Servant Hearts	pg. 10
The Wisemen's Seeking Hearts	pg. 14

Mary's Submissive Heart

(Lesson #1)

When my oldest daughter was nine years old she was Mary in our Christmas program at church. My youngest daughter, then seven, was the angel who announced the good news to the shepherd. The children at the church had been practicing for several months for the performance and all of the children did a fantastic job. As I watched my daughter play her part of Mary, I started to see Mary as the real human she was and her submissive heart was revealed even more to me.

Mary's heart has always been one I admired. But that year, as I watched my daughter and how she so willingly did whatever she was told to do, my thoughts about Mary went beyond admiration. As the director of the play, I would direct her with hand signals to do something and she would do it immediately. The signals to come to front stage; pick up baby Jesus; lay down baby Jesus; go get "big boy" Jesus; and eventually, let big boy Jesus run off stage (because he didn't want to be there); all directions were done exactly as she was told to do them – no questioning at all. It really drew my heart to a desire to go beyond admiration to adoption of the heart of Mary. The heart that so willingly was content to be a part of the Lord's will even in the midst of not understanding exactly what or how it was going to happen. Her heart was so content to do as the Lord desired that I am sure she, like my daughter, just watched for cues and followed them as directed.

God used Mary as a vessel to give birth to Baby Jesus, Who brought us light that warms our heart eternally. John begins his gospel writing about how Jesus, the Word, was there from the beginning. He reflects upon how Jesus was with God and is God. How God created everything through Jesus and how Jesus gave life to everything that was created. This part of John's gospel has always warmed my heart – "and His life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:4b-5 NLT) Jesus comes to us bringing a light, a warmth, that can never be extinguished. Further in his gospel John tells us the purpose of Jesus' human life. He came down from heaven to be lifted up on the cross and sacrificed so that we can have eternal life. Everyone who believes can have this warmth and reassurance of eternal life. It is a promise that our Father has given us. A blessing of warmth sent to us in an unexpected package, on an unexpected day, through an unexpected humble girl with a submissive heart named Mary.

One of my favorite verses is Luke 2:19, "And Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Mary's heart was one that not only was willing to do as the Lord directed, but one that pondered what all the Lord was doing through her. She participated in a magnificent part of the Lord's will by being the mother of the Messiah. In addition, the Lord calls for all His children to participate in His will in a magnificent way. I believe He calls us directly through the great commission where Jesus told us, ". . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) It is awesome to be called by this commission because not only are we participating in our Lord's will, but we are also bringing the news of eternal Salvation through Jesus Christ to the world along with how to live out that Salvation in the peace of Christ as displayed in Mary. This Christmas and beyond I hope you join me in moving past the admiration of Mary's heart to the adoption of a submissive heart like Mary's. If we have the heart to serve our Lord, He will use us in a mighty way.

Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Luke 1:26-38.

Can you imagine the thoughts that were going through Mary's mind right before the angel appeared to her? She was pledged to be married to Joseph; A man of great lineage as he was a descendant of David. She was probably dreaming about the family she would have with him and the joy they would have being together. Skipping through her mind was the joys of life. As a young betrothed woman, she probably didn't have many if any worries at all. Then all of a sudden an angel appears with one of the greatest things one can hear, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." (Luke 1:28)

Let's stop there in time and think about our own lives. Have you ever considered the fact that the Lord highly favors you? If not, is it because of the life that you lead? Is it a life that you are ashamed to bring before the Lord? I would venture to say that many Christians feel that the Lord loves them and they have a place waiting for them in heaven. However, because of our behavior and our inability to see ourselves through Jesus' eyes, we don't feel highly favored. And it is spiritually healthy for us to feel that way because if we do not lead a righteous life, then it is hard for the Lord to show us how much He favors us. Look at the following Scriptures to see what His Word has to say in regards to His favor.

Psalm 5:11-12:

Psalm 84:10-12:

Matthew 6:31-33:

We can see from these Scriptures that the Lord does favor us and He does take care of us. However, we draw away from the realization of that favor when we are not living a righteous life. A life that is righteous reveals the Lord more and more in our lives and shows how highly He favors us.

Back in our time frame with Mary, we see in Luke 1:29 Mary's response was that she was greatly troubled. Reality check here – UH YEAH! – Wouldn't you be troubled if all of a sudden an angel appeared before you? It doesn't matter what the words were that he was exclaiming. You have just been visited by an angel. That is troubling. I think Mary's response was one that many of us would have. Troubled and wondering – what is this all about?!?

However, we must notice the transition of Mary after hearing the message from the angel. Her heart changes from being troubled to seeking answers. This is a key sign of one who is being submissive. Think of the responses she could have made. Mary could have easily said, "Oh, you are crazy, that is impossible because I haven't known a man." then she could have disclaimed the reality of an angel even standing there. OR maybe Mary could have

Memory Verses:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

laughed at him like Sarah did when she heard the news of being the oldest mother. Mary's response was one that showed the submissive heart God favored. Her response was one that was seeking God for the answers and not jumping to conclusions.

How have you been seeking God for answers to circumstances in your life? Do you question the reality of the blessings He has promised to you by drawing your own conclusions? Throughout Scriptures we are encouraged to seek the Lord for the answers in our lives. Let's look at some of those Scriptures.

What does Jeremiah 29:12-14 tell us will happen if we seek the Lord with all our heart and all our soul? What does the Lord promise to do as a response to us seeking Him?

What does Acts 17:26-27 tell us about God's plan for us in regards to seeking Him? In reality, how far is God from us?

What does Proverb 11:27 promise us about seeking good? What about seeking evil?

A heart that is seeking God is one that the Lord favors. He desires for us to seek Him and when we do, it is an act of obedience that shows a submissive heart. Like Mary, we, too, can seek answers from the Lord for what we see as impossible situations in our lives.

Mary's final response really shows her heart of submission. In Luke 1:38 it says, "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled. Then the angel left her." Mary's immediate response was a proclamation of who she was in this scenario of life. She exclaimed to the angel, the Lord and to us today that she was a servant of the Lord awaiting for His Word to be fulfilled in her life.

Do you look at yourself as being a servant of the Lord? Are you waiting on Him to fulfill His Word in your life? Or are you fighting Him in fulfilling His Word in your life? Unfortunately, I find myself on occasion fighting against God's Will and it saddens me when I realize the fact that I am. The main reason it saddens me is because I know it is totally against the character of who I am supposed to be in Him. In addition, I know He seeks the best for my life and I am being foolish by not following His lead. Review the following Scriptures in regards to God's will and see how we should allow Him to work in our lives.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Proverbs 3:5-6

Philippians 2:12-13

Romans 12:1-2

The Lord tells us in Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” Our Lord has plans for us that will prosper us and are full of hope. Why should we fight against such a loving Father who desires our best!?! When we have a submissive heart, we will allow Him to lead us into His plans and ultimately into His Word. As Mary did, we will be His servant and be fulfilling His Word.

How submissive has your heart been lately? Do you realize the Lord favors you greatly and desires for you to see that in your life? Have you been seeking the Lord for answers to the complicated questions in your life? Are you acknowledging that you are His servant and should desire His Will and Word to be fulfilled in your life? My prayer is that we all will begin to have a submissive heart like Mary. I know in the mist of being submissive we will find the Lord’s miraculous power in our lives. A miraculous power that goes beyond our circumstances to a fulfillment of His Word!

Joseph's Heart of Compassion

(Lesson #2)

“That wasn’t very compassionate!” These words were streaming through my mind as I drove away from a fast food establishment one day. It was one of those days when I couldn’t believe my behavior and my mouth that went along with it. I was immediately convicted by the Holy Spirit and it didn’t feel good at all. Let me share the story.

It was a beautiful day. I had just come from teaching a Bible study class where we talked about pride and how it was the root of sin. The class was great. The students were engaged. The Holy Spirit used me to express His message about pride and how it can sneak up on you. When I left I was basking in God’s blessings of a nurturing lesson in my heart and the hearts’ of my students.

I was hungry so I thought I would pull through a drive-thru somewhere. I was taking a different route home and didn’t know what was in the area. So I was glad to see a familiar restaurant. I pulled up to the speaker, ordered and pulled through to the window. The clerk was friendly and gave me my order. I asked for a particular condiment which they usually give free at another location of this same named restaurant. The clerk said there was a charge for the condiment. Now, remember how the Lord said pride would sneak up on you . . . well . . . it did! I couldn’t accept the fact that this location would not give me this condiment for free. I quickly and very curtly replied, “The location across town gives it to me free. I can’t believe you won’t.” The clerk in a calm voice said, “My manager will not allow me to do that.” That is when the anger emotion of pride kicked in because I knew by the way this particular clerk was dressed compared to the others behind him that *he* was the manager. I looked him in the eye and with a look of disgust exclaimed, “Well, I will never come back to this location again!” and drove away.

I would have been happy in my prideful fit if it wasn’t for those windows that reflect like a mirror. Yep, those were the windows they had in that restaurant. As I was driving away I saw the reflection of the “Ladies for Jesus” sign I have on the side of my car. It was a glimpse of my sign that made me realize in my prideful fit I was not being the compassionate Christian I was called to be by Christ. I pulled out of the parking lot of the restaurant with my head hung low and I couldn’t even enjoy my meal. Just that quickly pride had turned my soaring soul from the blessings of God’s teachings to the weight sin placed on me. Did I turn around and tell the clerk I was sorry? No, because as normal prideful fits go, when you are convicted, there is an arguing within yourself that you had some rights to act the way you did. The struggle lingers for a while as your sinful nature tries to hold onto a part of your character. However, I did ask for God to forgive me for disgracing His name by my behavior.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation like this? Maybe the scenario is not the same, but you understand the hold pride can have on your life. All of us can relate because we are all born with a sinful nature and sin is rooted in pride. I think that is what attracted me to begin admiring the heart of Joseph when he heard the news about Mary’s pregnancy. His heart was one that immediately responded with compassion and was not driven by pride. A heart that was willing to not disgrace Mary while at the same time knowing her pregnancy could make him look like he was hiding something. He chose to be compassionate and for that I believe the Lord was glorified and Joseph was blessed.

Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Matthew 1:18-25; 2:13-23.

Can you imagine the feelings Joseph had as he heard the news that his betrothed was pregnant? Questions probably rapidly fired through his mind. What!?! How could this be? Not my beloved Mary. She would never do such a disgraceful thing as this. While it settled into Joseph's mind, he probably began to wonder how things could have changed so quickly. They were just planning their happy lives together. Everything was going to plan and they were getting closer to being together as one. He probably had just finished working on final plans for their new home and they would begin work soon. This news wasn't part of the plan and definitely hit his pride on a level that was unbearable and would disgrace any man. But Joseph had a heart of compassion that the Scriptures describe first of all as being righteous. Joseph sought to do the right thing even though it meant he must detach from his beloved Mary.

Psalm 106: 3 tells us, "*Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*" I don't know about you but each time I see that one is blessed for behavior I want to see how I can adapt that behavior in my life. Blessings are an overflow of God's grace from when He is pleased with us and I want to please God. Righteousness is not just something we are requested to do by the Father. It is something He requires of us as our character of being a redeemed saint. Could this Psalm been one that Joseph was thinking of as he pondered his situation? The Scriptures are filled with calls for God's people to be righteous. Let's take a look at some of them.

What does 1 John 2:28-29 reveal to us about the Source of our righteousness?

1 Peter 3:13-16 tells us if we are eager to do good, even if we suffer we are blessed. What does verse 15 of this passage tell us is the beginning of these acts of doing right?

What does 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 tell us is the evidence of God's righteous judgment? Are these prevalent in your life today?

We are unable to be righteous on our own. It is only through the accepting of the blood of Christ that we may obtain Christ's righteousness in our lives. For Joseph's life, he was looking forward to the Messiah to come and his actions for doing so was to follow the law God had given Moses. However, to follow that law Joseph had to make sacrifices as well. We will see that in our next section. Through Christ's righteousness, we can do the right thing in our lives and obtain God's blessings by pleasing Him. A righteous life is one worth seeking even through our suffering for doing so.

Memory Verses:

"... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

1 Colossians 10b-12 (NIV)

Joseph's heart of compassion is exemplified in the fact that he did not want to disgrace Mary. A heart of compassion takes into consideration how others will be affected by their actions. For us to fully understand Joseph's sacrifice in having this heart of compassion toward Mary, we must understand the traditional Jewish wedding during Biblical times.

There were three stages to a traditional Jewish wedding. The first stage was the "ketubah" contract which was signed by the husband and the bride's father. Once this was signed the couple was 100% married but did not have sex yet. This was the legal binding document of the marriage and three copies were made; one for the husband, one for the bride's father, one that was filed at the temple. During this stage and before the next stage, the husband had to fulfill a "dowry" to the bride's father; pay the "bride price," which was usually set at 50 shekels of silver; and an inventory of the bride's estate – what she was contributing to the marriage – was taken. The second stage was the "chuppah" which was the consummation of the marriage. This stage usually happened within one year, however, it could take up to 7 years. The final stage was the wedding feast. At the conclusion of the wedding feast the couple had concluded the traditional Jewish ritual of marriage.

When the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and Christ was conceived, Joseph and Mary had completed only the first stage, "ketubah," of the Jewish wedding. This meant they were legally 100% married and to legally end the marriage Joseph had to divorce her. However, Joseph had a choice in how he would divorce her. He had great grounds to divorce her by claiming she was unfaithful and no longer a virgin. The pregnancy alone would be his evidence. If he did it in this manner, then the dowry and bride price would be returned to him. This choice, however, would harm Mary's reputation. Joseph's second choice, and the one he had made, was to secretly divorce her without cause. This would harm Joseph's reputation and he would not be given the dowry and bride price back. In addition, he would have to pay an additional 100 shekels of silver for divorce without cause.

In looking at what Joseph had to sacrifice we see that his heart of compassion still overshadowed the suffering he would have to endure. He considered Mary's reputation above his own and in doing so this pleased God. Scripture shows us ways that we can have this same heart. Look at the following verses and write down the behavior it tells us we should have if we are to be compassionate.

Ephesians 4:29-32:

Galatians 6:1-2:

Colossians 3:12-14:

Now review these verses again and write below the One who is described in each as the example we should follow.

To have a compassionate heart we must follow the example of Christ. These Scriptures describe behaviors of a compassionate heart. However, to fully display these behaviors in a Christ-like manner we must look to the Holy Spirit to guide us in all we do.

Joseph's heart of compassion was courageous and willing to take risks to do the right thing even when it meant his own pride would be trampled upon. We see this heart even more when reading how he was obedient to God's Word in Matthew 2:13-15. This obedience was one that fulfilled the words the Lord had given the prophets in the Old Testament. In addition, we see in Matthew 2:19-23 that Joseph's heart walked closely with the Lord and followed directions. Overall, showing us how Joseph's heart displayed righteousness and how he pleased the Lord in his actions.

Can the Lord describe your actions as righteous? Are you obedient to Him? Do you seek to please Him in all you do? Is your obedience evident by the fulfilling of God's promises in your life? Consider how you can adapt the compassionate heart of Joseph by seeking to please the Lord and by seeking to do the right thing in your life – even if it means you will suffer.

The Shepherds' Servant Hearts

(Lesson #3)

As I have worked within my own church and in another church's office, I've noticed many servant hearts over the years. There are many servants of the church who do things on a regular basis; things that many of us enjoy having done, but don't think about *how* or *who* does it. Some of these are:

- Straightening the sanctuary after services in preparation for the next service.
- Sweeping the front stoop of the entry and taking out the trash before it begins to smell.
- Cooking and cleaning up behind themselves for a weekly lunch to feed the community.
- Changing the message on the sign near the road so those who drive by would get a glimpse of Christ and His Word.
- Counting money after service while their tummies are ready for that great Sunday dinner.
- Getting a dead animal out from under the sanctuary so it wouldn't smell and ruin service.
- Washing the side of the fellowship hall building on someone's day off from work.

This list can go on and on. It is amazing how those who have a servant's heart work in the backgrounds. You never really know who they are because they are usually the ones who are doing it out of their love for Christ and in following His leadership they are humble in their service.

My father is one of these servants that I have observed. On Sunday mornings he sweeps the front stoop of our Sunday School building so that it looks presentable for those who come to Sunday School. Over the years that stoop has changed from a small stoop to a drive thru concrete slab, but still he makes sure it is clear of debris. He folds the bulletins and inserts whatever anyone has for him to insert without complaining. I have noticed that even if he is complete and someone comes in with a new insert (that is usually me), he doesn't complain. Then he hands out the bulletins at the beginning of each service as a greeter. I have visited many churches before, but I have never seen a greeter like my father. He certainly has the gift of greeting. I have seen those who are walking into church service with their heads hanging and all the worry of the world on their shoulders. Once they reach the church door and see my father's face their spirits are lifted immediately. You can see the countenance on their face change from drag to brightness. It is usually the greeting that they receive that makes them brighten, "Good Morning, Jane, so glad to see you here this morning. You sure are looking pretty!" That is a regular greeting you will receive from my father. It doesn't matter how you feel or really how you look, he's glad you came and sees you how Christ's sees you – as beautiful!

In seeking to have a humble servant's heart, I have asked the Lord to reveal to me the characteristics of a servant of His; characteristics that please Him for the service that is performed. He has revealed to me that a servant is willing to serve no matter what the task may be and whatever the time they are called. I have seen how servants are so willing to rearrange their own schedules to do the Lord's work. This alone amazes me how much they put the Lord first in their lives. Without complaint, they get to work on the task at hand. They have a joyful and jubilant spirit about them. They are eager to serve and usually seek where they can serve and desire for you to ask them to serve. And this is the most important characteristic I have picked up from those who have a servant's heart: They can see beyond what the world sees and look through Christ's eyes. Viewing through the eyes of the perfect servant, they see what needs to be done . . . a little sweeping, a little folding, or a little encouraging . . . they see the need and they fulfill it as Christ would have it fulfilled.

In looking at the story of Jesus' birth, I see this same servant heart in the shepherds. They were willing to serve the Lord and trust in Him as they followed His lead. As we study their steps, let's seek to have a servant's heart so we too can please Christ in fulfilling the needs He sees in this world.

Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Luke 2:8-20

It was a clear night and the sky was beautiful. The field was quiet and all the sheep had settled down. The shepherds had done their job. They had led them to the waters to drink and cleared the path for them as they traveled the mountainous terrain to this location. It seemed to be shaping up to a quiet night as all the sheep and even the lambs seem to be satisfied. None of them seemed to want to wander away and no predators seemed to be in sight. This was the kind of night the shepherds enjoyed. It was a peaceful night when you can look at the sky and enjoy God's creation as you watched over the flocks. This story starts off by telling us that the Shepherds were abiding (or living) in the field. Now one might think that this was the shepherd's job to abide in the field. However, when we consider the heart of one who desires to be a shepherd, we will see that a servant's heart is evident. A servant's heart is one who abides in the service that is in need. Many times this may mean there is a need for them to change their lives so they can abide. Let's look at what Jesus has to say about abiding in Him.

Memory Verses:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. . . . This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

John 15:5, 8 (NIV)

Read John 15:1-17. In this Scripture Jesus talks about how important it is that we abide (or remain) in Him. What do these particular verses describe as a reason or benefit for abiding in Christ.

John 15:4 ~

John 15:5-6 ~

John 15:7-8 ~

According to John 15:10-11, what is the way we can abide in Christ's love? What is the benefit from this way of abiding in Christ's love?

What does Jesus say we are to Him if we do what He commands? (John 15:14-15)

Don't you just love how Christ's describes what He means by abiding in Him? He doesn't leave it up for us to guess. He tells us explicitly that if we are to abide in His love than we must obey. How many times have you tried to abide in Christ love, but you didn't want to obey Him? Abiding in Christ means we are to obey and in that obedience there is a joy that overflows into the love that He desires for us to experience.

The night soon changed from tranquility to uncertainty. All of a sudden the sky was overshadowed by light and an angel appeared. The shepherds were terrified not knowing what to think or what to do next. They trembled in fear. Can you imagine if you were one of these shepherds how you would have felt? I think I would have been just as terrified and probably hiding behind one of my sheep, the biggest one I could find near me. Thankfully, the angel immediately goes into the message of good tidings. I'm sure they were still terrified, but the message was worth settling down to ponder. The thing that amazes me the most is that the shepherds didn't sit and ponder this message long. Instead, they went on their way to find out what the angels were talking about. Have you ever wondered if they left the sheep behind or if they took them along? I know we see many scenes where there are actually sheep with the shepherds at the manger scene, but was that really the case? Or did they trust the Lord to take care of the sheep while they were gone? Regardless, they had to trust the Lord if they were taking them or not, because they had to go and see about this news that was just told to them and they had to go right at that moment.

A servant's heart is not one that procrastinates. They hear the news of something the Lord has done or of something the Lord needs to get done and they move forward immediately.

The Bible refers to those who procrastinate as being "sluggards." According to Proverbs 13:4, what is the difference in the sluggard and diligent person's appetite or desires?

According to Ephesians 5:15-17, why should we make the best use of our time? (v. 16)
What does the wise person do? (v. 17)

Many times we procrastinate in doing what the Lord has called us to do because we have too many other priorities in our lives that are overshadowing the Lord's call. According to Matthew 6:33-34, what is the answer to this problem? Why is it important that we take care of each day's troubles on the day they appear?

Procrastination is a huge problem in many lives of Christians. And many times it is because we are too busy with our own desires that we don't want to take the time to do what the Lord has called us to do. Even in writing this study, I have experienced this problem and have been fighting against the struggles of life. However, the Scriptures are clear that we *must* put God first in our lives. He will direct our paths and He will show us His will. This is what the servant heart of the shepherd's displayed as they eagerly got up to see what the angels had told them about.

After the shepherd's had seen baby Jesus, their hearts were overflowing with a joy to tell the world about what they had seen. They glorified and praised the Lord everywhere they went. A servant's heart is one that not only displays God's love through their actions but through the praises of their lips. I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with those who serve the Lord who can't wait to tell what all the Lord has done in their lives. You see, it is in the midst of serving God that He reveals more and more miracles in your life; miracles that you can't wait to share with the world.

As Christians we know that we are supposed to fulfill the great commission (Matthew 28:19). However, how many of us realize that the fulfillment of that commission is many times done in the living of our lives? When we proclaim God's goodness in our own lives we are telling others that He loves us and He loves them as well. What does Psalm 16:8-11 tell us about setting the Lord before us? What does it do to our hearts, whole being, and flesh?

Write below the promise that is proclaimed by the psalmist in Psalm 16:11?

Christ is who leads us in triumphal procession as we go through this life. What does 2 Corinthians 2:14 tell us that He does through us as we proceed in life?

The message of Christ is powerful. It has been powerful in many lives. According to Romans 1:16, why should we not be ashamed to proclaim the gospel?

As the shepherd's did when Christ was born and as we can proclaim today, Christ, the Messiah, has come. He has come to redeem His people. There is no better message we can speak about in our lives.

Are you striving to have a servant's heart? Do you abide with Christ and seek His word to dwell in your life? Do you desire to produce His fruit in the world? Or are you procrastinating in producing His fruit and you would rather produce your own? It is a good thing for us to realize we are procrastinators and have not been fulfilling the Lord's desires in our lives. In realizing this we can ask the Lord to strengthen us in overcoming the obstacles that we have allowed to get in the way of us proclaiming His message of love to this world. Don't sit in regret over what you have not done in the past, but look to the future as a fresh opportunity. Look to the future through Christ's eyes and see yourself as the servant He is calling you to be.

The Wisemen's Seeking Heart

(Lesson #4)

Christmas shopping during the year of 2003 is one that I will not forget. *Tickle Me Elmo* was the toy my husband and I were on the search for our oldest daughter. She was then 13 months old and Elmo was the character that made her eyes brighten when he came on the screen. We wanted to make sure she had the latest from the Elmo products and felt like this one would be easy to find this year as the year before, 2002, people were trampling over each other to get to the Elmo toy. My husband and I searched everywhere. I guess a character like Elmo continues to keep his fans throughout the years. I remember that I was about six weeks pregnant with our second daughter at that time and I was exhausted just from God using my body to knit her together in my womb. However, the search had to go on. We had to find this special toy for our dear daughter and finally we did.

Over the years of being a mommy of two little girls the search has changed from that special toy to mommy being the search engine in the family. See if these sound like familiar quotes in your house.

Mom, where are my shoes? Mom, where is my other shoe?

Mom, I can't find my jacket. Do you have it? (Okay, side note here: why would *I* have a child's jacket? Yes dear, I was just wearing it - *Really!* I haven't fit into that size since I was . . . well, a child.)

Mom, where's my library book? It's due today.

Mom, why can't I find the hair brush?

Mom, I just had my socks, where are they now?

Then hubby doesn't like to feel left out . . . Honey, where did you put my camouflage jacket? (Okay, another side note here: you know he really didn't say Honey, but notice the blame being placed on me for *him* not being able to find *his* jacket . . . yeah, that is real AND again - *Really!*)

We all have had to hunt for items in our households and usually everyone thinks moms are the only ones who know their location. I wish that was true! God did give us the memory to see items and program them in our mind for future reference. So if we have seen it in the past, we might have a chance of locating it. He also gave us the ability to *move* items as we search! I think that is something women develop after either marrying or having their first child. I don't think many men have developed that ability!!

Searching for things in our life is an ongoing venture. We search for love in all the wrong places; joy in the empty material things in life; peace from the world's security; and happiness from others who cannot provide it. Thinking back over my life, I recall many unfruitful trips down lanes that led towards empty findings. It was not until I realized my need for Christ in my life that I understood more of *how* to search for the things I desire. The Lord over the years has taught me how to focus my search engine towards Him. He has taught me to seek Him first and let Him take care of the desires of my heart. And the amazing thing is that He *does* know where to find all that I desire. Why wouldn't I go to Him?

As we look at the heart of the wise men, who traveled a long distance to find the Christ Child, let's think of how our heart searches for the Lord. Open your mind and heart to experience what the Lord wants to teach you about searching for Him.

Deepening the Walk

Begin this study by reading Matthew 2:1-12

Who were the magi, those gift-bearing wise men from the east so central to the traditional telling of the Christmas story? The Bible tells us very little about the magi. Their story appears but once, this account of the gospel of Matthew. It is almost like they are mysterious visitors “from the east” who come to Jerusalem looking for the child whose star they observed “at its rising.” These men were searching based off of their knowledge of the stars and their knowledge of Jewish prophecy. It also seems they were searching for the truth as they had a purpose for coming, “to worship him.” There were many magi during that time who were not searching for truth. In fact, many of them were wrapped up in being magicians or sorcerers. In the Greek of Matthew 2 the magi are referred to as “magoi.” We see this same word used in the form of “magos” in Acts 13:16 where it talks about the Jewish Sorcerer. From this we see that these were not ordinary magi, but ones who were seeking more than knowledge. They were seeking truth.

Memory Verses:

“For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:32-33 (NIV)

A seeking heart is one that searches for truth. On many occasions I have to stop and ask myself this question, “Am I seeking the truth?” This seems like a simple question to answer, but with the deception of the spirit of Satan in the world, it is hard for us to tell at times. We may get so wrapped up in our own desires that we stray away from the truth that God has in our lives; The truth of Jesus being our Savior and also our life.

What does Jesus say about Himself in John 14:6? In what ways does this apply to your life today?

In 1 Corinthians 3:18-23, Paul is correcting the church about choosing sides of human leaders. How does he describe the wisdom of the world in God’s sight? In what ways have you allowed the wisdom of the world to take you away from the truth in God’s wisdom?

As we seek for truth in our lives, what does Matthew 7:7 tell us we must do? What does Matthew 7:8 promise will happen if we do this?

As believers, we all have been given the Holy Spirit. What kind of guidance will the Holy Spirit give us according to John 16:13?

The truth we seek is in Jesus Christ. He is the truth and the only way we can approach the Father. His redeeming blood and acceptance of His sacrifice is what gives us access to the wisdom of God. This is a wisdom that the Father has chosen to give to us through His very own Spirit – the Holy Spirit.

After meeting with King Herod, who feigns an intention to worship the child but actually plans to destroy him, the magi follow the same star to Bethlehem. In other words, they continue on their journey. We see that King Herod has ulterior motives for the magi to continue their search, but we must realize at this moment the magi had failed in an attempt to find the “king of the Jews.” Their travels took them to Jerusalem because that would be the logical worldly wisdom answer as to where the king of the Jews would be born. However, that was a futile end because the child was not there.

Realize that at the moment of not finding the child in Jerusalem they could have given up. However, a seeking heart does not give up when it is in search of truth. What does Galatian 6:9 tell us we will receive if we do not grow weary in doing good?

According to Ephesians 6:18, how should we seek God in prayer?

What does Hebrews 6:10-12 tell us about God and our labor of love? What do these verses encourage us to do? To not do?

Perseverance is a key element in our Christian walk. As we seek God, our enemy the devil does not want us to find Him. Therefore, he will throw up many obstacles in our way. However, we must always keep in mind the Lord’s promise in Deuteronomy 4:29, *“But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.”*

Upon seeing the baby Jesus and his mother Mary, the magi kneel down and worship him, presenting him with their three famous gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh. After being warned in a dream, the magi did not report back to Herod but instead departed for their homeland via another route. An encounter with Christ is one that we will leave us not wanting to return to our ways of error. A true repentance of the heart is shown by one turning around and going in the opposite direction of the error or sin in their lives.

One who has a seeking heart desires true repentance and to please the Lord. Ephesians 5:10 tells us to, *“find out what pleases the Lord.”* To please the Lord we must live our lives through Christ. What does Galatians 2:29 tell us as to how we can do this?

The magi brought gifts to the Christ Child. We can bring a gift as well. What are we encouraged to do in Romans 12:1-2? How have you done this lately in your own life?

In what ways should we bring God glory according to 1 Corinthians 10:31?

Our desire to have a seeking heart is one that will empower us as we deepen our walk with Christ. God's love for us has overflowed into our lives and we respond with a love for Him. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). This is a love that we show through our desire to please Him and obey all He has commanded. This obedience begins by presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice and renewing ourselves in Him. When we encounter Christ, we no longer see the world as something we want to conform to, but instead we see the truth shining through a Savior that has changed our life forever!

Do you have a seeking heart? Is it seeking the truth of who God really is in your life? Don't shy away from God thinking that you can't find out more about Him. He desires for you to seek Him. He desires to change your life through Christ!

Conclusion

I have enjoyed sharing what the Lord has placed on my heart in regards to the hearts of those He chose to be a part of the Savior's birth. I hope you have been encouraged to have a submissive heart like Mary; a compassionate heart like Joseph; a servant heart like the Shepherds; and a seeking heart like the Wise men. The Lord truly does desire to be a part of our lives through the redemptive blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. I pray that you will continue to seek to please Him; trust Him in fulfilling your desires; and diligently find out what pleases Him as you are obedient to His commands.

Your Sister and Fellow Servant of Christ,

Kelly Dixon



Ladies for Jesus ministry desires to inspire and equip all Christian women to deepen our walk with Christ; to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to Him; and to delight in our intimate relationship with Him. We hope that we have inspired you through fellowship, music and message to deepen your walk with Christ.

The entire *Ladies for Jesus* Leadership Team is made up of ladies who deeply love the Lord and want to experience Him more. They will inspire you as they share their gifts and life experiences with Christ. During our group sessions this team will spiritually grow along with you as they lead you in exploring the retreat's topic at a deeper level. The group sessions have been described as "fabulous" and "life changing." You definitely don't want to miss what the Lord has for us to explore in these retreats!

Check out the other Bible Studies Kelly Dixon has written for Ladies for Jesus on www.ladiesforJesus.com. Ladies for Jesus retreat topics are also located on the website. Please email retreats@ladiesforJesus.com if you would like to book a Ladies for Jesus retreat.