

THE HEART RENOVATION

A Complete Guide to the Scriptures of the Heart

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh.”*

— Ezekiel 36:26

*Not knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but intimacy.
Not reading to finish, but reading to be changed.*

For men pursuing God with their whole heart.

How to Use This Guide

This is not a checklist. It is a path. The stages are ordered intentionally — each one builds on what came before — but the pace is yours. Some passages will hold you for days. Let them. The goal is not to finish the guide; the goal is to let God finish something in you.

The guide is organized in seven parts. Parts I through V follow the arc of heart renovation through Scripture — from the condition of the heart, to God’s desire for it, to the prophetic promises, to the fulfillment in Jesus, to the ongoing work of the Spirit. Part VI turns the renovation outward — into your marriage, your fatherhood, and your daily relationships. Part VII closes with what the renovated life looks like in practice and in eternal hope.

Your Daily Rhythm

Read the passage once through slowly. Do not rush to understand or extract. Just read it as if someone you love is speaking to you — because He is.

Read it a second time. This time, notice what word, phrase, or image catches your attention. What feels warm, heavy, uncomfortable, alive? Write that down.

Journal. Talk to God on paper about what you noticed. Ask Him questions. Write what you sense Him saying back. Do not overthink this — just write.

Sit in silence for a few minutes. Let the passage rest on you. This is not wasted time. This is where renovation happens.

When to Practice Lectio Divina

Throughout this guide, certain passages are marked for lectio divina. These are passages short enough and rich enough to sustain the practice well. But you can use lectio divina with any passage that grips you.

Lectio Divina — A Simple Guide

1. **LECTIO (Read):** Read the passage slowly aloud or in a whisper. Let the words have weight.
2. **MEDITATIO (Meditate):** Read it again. What word or phrase draws you? Sit with it. Turn it over like a stone in your hand.
3. **ORATIO (Pray):** Read it a third time. Let the word become a prayer. Speak back to God from what He has surfaced.
4. **CONTEMPLATIO (Rest):** Read it one last time. Then stop talking. Just be with God. Let the word do its work in silence.

Do not worry about doing this ‘right.’ The point is slow, repeated encounter with the text and the God behind it.

Journaling Prompts

You do not need to use these every day, but when you are not sure what to write:

- What is God showing me about my heart today?
- Where am I resistant to what I just read? Why?
- What would it look like if I actually believed this?
- What am I protecting that God is asking me to release?
- God, what do you want me to know right now?
- If this passage is true, what changes about how I live today?
- Where is my heart hard right now? Where is it soft?
- What does my wife / family need from me right now?
- Am I carrying something God never asked me to carry?

Formation Notes and Companion Voices

Throughout this guide you will find “Formation Notes” — brief references to how Christian authors and teachers across the centuries have engaged the same scriptures you are reading. Their insights are meant to deepen your encounter with the text, not replace it. Scripture always comes first. These notes are breadcrumbs, not the bread.

Here are the voices you will encounter, and why they matter:

Dallas Willard (1935–2013) was a philosophy professor at USC and one of the most influential writers on Christian spiritual formation in the modern era. His books *Renovation of the Heart* and *The Divine Conspiracy* explore how the human heart is transformed into Christlikeness — not through behavior modification, but through deep, interior change empowered by the Spirit. His work is the primary theological backbone of this guide.

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) was a British author, literary scholar, and perhaps the most widely read Christian apologist of the 20th century. His works *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and *The Weight of Glory* combine intellectual rigor with deep spiritual insight. Lewis had a rare gift for making profound truths accessible and for exposing the self-deceptions of the human heart.

Ronald Rolheiser (b. 1947) is a Catholic priest, theologian, and author of *The Holy Longing* and *Sacred Fire*. He writes about the deep restlessness at the center of human experience and how Christian spirituality addresses it. His work is particularly helpful for understanding desire, longing, and the ache for God that drives the spiritual life.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was one of the most important theologians in the history of the church. His *Confessions* is the first great spiritual autobiography, tracing his journey from a

restless, disordered heart to rest in God. His famous prayer — “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you” — captures the entire arc of this guide in a single sentence.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), John of the Cross (1542–1591), and Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) are mystics and saints from the medieval and early modern church who wrote extensively about the soul’s union with God. They are referenced briefly in this guide as representatives of the contemplative tradition — the stream of Christianity that emphasizes interior experience, silence, and deep communion with God.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was an American pastor and theologian whose work *Religious Affections* remains one of the most important books ever written on distinguishing genuine spiritual experience from its counterfeits. His insights on true spiritual affection versus self-driven zeal are particularly relevant for men who are intense, driven, and serious about their faith.

Heart Checks and Anchor Truths

Part VI of this guide introduces two additional elements: “Heart Checks” are pointed questions designed for journaling that connect Scripture directly to your daily life as a husband and father. “Anchor Truths” are foundational statements to return to when the old patterns fire.

A Note on Pace

Some stages will take three weeks. Some might take eight. Do not move to the next stage just because time has passed — move when you sense that God has done something in you through the readings, or when you feel a genuine readiness to move forward. If you spend two months on Part III because the prophetic promises are undoing you, that is not falling behind. That is the guide working.

Part I: The Condition of the Heart

Before renovation can begin, you need to see what God sees. This part is about honesty — letting Scripture show you the human heart as it is without God’s intervention. This is not meant to produce shame. It is meant to produce hunger. When you see the depth of the problem, the promise of a new heart becomes breathtakingly good news.

Formation Note: *Dallas Willard wrote that the heart is the “executive center” of the self — the place from which outlook, choices, and actions come. Augustine called it the deepest interior of a person, the place where God and the soul meet. As you begin, ask God to show you what is actually governing your heart — not what you think governs it.*

Reading 1: The Fracture — Genesis 3

Read the whole chapter slowly. This is the story of how the human heart first turned away. Pay attention to the sequence: doubt about God’s word, desire for something apart from God, hiding, blame. Notice that God comes looking for them. He initiates. Journal about where you see this same sequence in your own life.

Reading 2: The First Murder — Genesis 4:1–16

Sin’s effect on the heart escalates immediately. Cain’s anger burns, and God speaks directly to him before the act: “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” This is the first picture of God warning a human heart about what is happening inside it. Notice that God gives Cain a chance. Journal about the places where sin “crouches at the door” of your own heart.

Reading 3: The Grief of God — Genesis 6:1–8

God sees the condition of human hearts and He grieves. Sit with the reality that your sin does not just break rules — it grieves a Person. What does it mean that the Creator of the universe is moved in His heart by the state of yours?

Reading 4: The Tower — Genesis 11:1–9

The heart that says “let us make a name for ourselves” rather than “let us know the name of God.” Babel is the story of a collective heart turned inward. It is subtle — the people are not doing something overtly evil, they are simply building without God. Where in your life are you building something impressive that has nothing to do with God’s purposes?

Reading 5: The Hardened Heart — Exodus 7–8 (selected)

Read the passages about Pharaoh’s hardened heart: 7:13–14, 7:22–23, 8:15, 8:19, 8:32. Notice the terrifying pattern: sometimes Pharaoh hardens his own heart, and sometimes the Lord hardens it.

Hardening is a process, not a single event. Each refusal makes the next refusal easier. Ask God: where is my heart becoming calloused? Where am I refusing to listen?

Reading 6: The Golden Calf — Exodus 32

Israel watched God split the sea, ate bread from heaven, heard His voice at Sinai — and within weeks fashioned a golden idol. The heart does not stay loyal on the basis of past experience alone. It needs ongoing encounter, ongoing surrender. This is why daily time with God matters. It is not a duty; it is the difference between a heart that stays soft and one that turns to gold.

Reading 7: The Cycle — Judges 17–21

Read these closing chapters of Judges. The refrain “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” is the summary of a heart without a king. Where in your life are you doing what is right in your own eyes? Where have you set yourself up as your own authority?

Reading 8: Guard Your Heart — Proverbs 4:20–27

Lectio Divina passage. “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” The Hebrew word for “guard” carries the sense of a watchman on a wall, protecting a city. Your heart is a city. What are you letting through the gates? Spend two mornings here.

Reading 9: The Deceitful Heart — Jeremiah 17:1–10

Lectio Divina passage. One of the most important passages on the heart in all of Scripture. Read the whole section. Notice the contrast between the person who trusts in man and the person who trusts in the Lord. Then sit with verse 10: God searches the heart. He tests the mind. Let Him search yours. Spend at least two mornings here.

Formation Note: *Lewis observed that we are “half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.” He saw the problem of the heart not merely as wickedness but as settling — accepting far too little because we cannot imagine what God is actually offering. As you sit with Jeremiah 17, ask not only “where is my heart deceitful?” but also “where is my heart settling for less than God?”*

Reading 10: The Heart Laid Bare — Psalm 139:1–24

Lectio Divina passage — focus especially on verses 23–24. David is not afraid of God searching him — he is asking for it. This is what a heart that wants renovation sounds like. God knows when you sit and when you rise, He perceives your thoughts from afar. You are fully known. That is terrifying and comforting at once. Pray these verses back to God as your own prayer.

Reading 11: Layer in Psalm 51

David wrote this after his greatest failure. Notice he does not just ask for forgiveness — he asks for a new heart, a right spirit, a restored joy. He knows that behavior modification is not enough. He needs

something only God can do on the inside. This Psalm will come back later. For now, let it sink in as a prayer of longing.

Reading 12: The Living Word — Hebrews 4:12–13

Lectio Divina passage. The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Everything is naked and exposed before Him. This passage tells you what has been happening every morning you have sat with the Bible: the word has been cutting, dividing, exposing. It is surgical. But it is the surgery of a physician who loves you. Let it reframe how you approach every other passage in this guide.

Formation Note: *Willard understood the Bible not as a textbook but as a living address from God. He wrote that the word of God comes to rearrange the furniture of the soul. As you read Hebrews 4:12–13, ask yourself: am I coming to the Bible to get information, or am I coming to be known?*

Reading 13: The Heart in Proverbs — A Slow Meditation

Spend several mornings reading through these Proverbs one or two at a time, journaling on each:

Proverbs 3:5–6 — Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Proverbs 4:23 — Guard your heart. Proverbs 14:30 — A tranquil heart gives life to the body. Proverbs 15:13–15 — A joyful heart makes a cheerful face. Proverbs 16:9 — The heart plans, but the Lord establishes steps. Proverbs 20:5 — The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water. Proverbs 21:2 — Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. Proverbs 27:19 — As water reflects face, so the heart reflects the man.

Before You Move On

Spend a morning journaling before you move to Part II. Ask yourself: What has God shown me about the condition of my heart? Where have I been operating from a “heart of stone” without realizing it? What am I beginning to hunger for?

Part II: God’s Desire for the Heart

This is where the tone shifts. You have looked honestly at the problem. Now you turn to see what God has wanted all along. The Bible reveals a God who is not primarily angry at the human heart, but aching for it. He has always wanted intimacy. He designed us for it.

Formation Note: *Rolheiser writes that at the center of every human life is a fundamental restlessness, an unquenchable fire. Augustine named this same reality centuries earlier: “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” This part is about discovering that God’s heart is restless for you, too. The longing goes both ways.*

Reading 1: Walking with God — Genesis 5:21–24 and Genesis 6:9

Enoch “walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.” And Noah “walked with God.” Before any law, any temple, any covenant, the picture of the godly life is simply walking with God. Heart-to-heart companionship. This is what God has wanted from the beginning. Journal about what “walking with God” looks like in your life right now.

Reading 2: The Friend of God — Genesis 12:1–9, 15:1–6, and 18:17–19

Abraham is called the “friend of God” (James 2:23, Isaiah 41:8). Read these three key moments: the call, the covenant, and God’s remarkable statement — “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” God shares His plans with Abraham. He lets him in. This is the intimacy of heart-to-heart friendship with God.

Reading 3: The Shema — Deuteronomy 6:1–9

Lectio Divina passage. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.” God’s first command about the heart is not “clean it up” — it is “love Me with it.” Spend two or three mornings here. God is not giving a law — He is expressing a desire.

Reading 4: Circumcise Your Heart — Deuteronomy 10:12–22

God tells Israel to circumcise their hearts — to cut away the resistance that keeps them from full devotion. But notice verse 15: He chose their fathers because He delighted in them. The call to circumcise the heart comes from love, not demand.

Reading 5: Choose Life — Deuteronomy 30:1–20

God says He Himself will circumcise their hearts. What He commanded in chapter 10, He promises to do Himself in chapter 30. Read verses 11–14: the word is not far from you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. God does not ask you to do the impossible and leave you to figure it out. He does the work.

Reading 6: Incline Your Heart — Joshua 24:14–27

Joshua's final charge: "Choose this day whom you will serve." Notice verse 23: "Incline your heart to the Lord." Inclining is a posture, not a performance.

Reading 7: God Looks at the Heart — 1 Samuel 16:1–13

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." This is God revealing what He has always cared about most. Journal about what God sees when He looks at your heart — not in judgment, but in love.

Reading 8: A Heart that Listens — 1 Kings 3:5–14

Solomon asks for a "hearing heart" (the Hebrew literal). Of all the things he could have asked for, he asks for a heart that can hear God. God is delighted. What would change if your primary prayer was not for outcomes, but for a heart that hears?

Reading 9: The Pursuing Heart of God — Hosea 1–3, then 11

Read chapters 1–3 as one sitting. This is God's heart for an unfaithful people, told through a marriage. Then chapter 11, verse 8: "How can I give you up? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused." Before God renovates your heart, see that His own heart is moved.

Spend an extra morning on Hosea 11:1–9 as a lectio divina passage. Let God speak these words over you.

Reading 10: The Tender Heart of God — Isaiah 49:14–16

Lectio Divina passage. "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast? Though she may forget, I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." When your heart whispers "He has forgotten me," return to these verses.

Reading 11: The Song — Song of Solomon (selected)

Read chapters 1–2 and 8:6–7 devotionally. The Christian tradition has long read this book as a picture of God's intimate love for His people. If it feels unfamiliar to think of God's love as passionate, pursuing, jealous — sit with that discomfort. It is part of the renovation.

Formation Note: *The mystics and saints — Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila — all returned to the Song of Solomon as the supreme picture of the soul's union with God. You are in ancient and holy company when you read this book as a love letter from God to your heart.*

Reading 12: The Gentle Whisper — 1 Kings 19:1–18

Elijah is exhausted, afraid, running. God does not meet him in the earthquake, wind, or fire. He meets him in a still, small voice. This is how God often speaks to the heart: not in dramatic events

but in quiet, interior encounters. Where have you been looking for God in the dramatic when He is speaking in the still?

Reading 13: Rest for Your Souls — Matthew 11:28–30

Lectio Divina passage. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Jesus describes His own heart: gentle and humble. Being yoked to Him produces rest, not more striving.

Formation Note: *Willard understood the “yoke” as apprenticeship — learning to live your actual life the way Jesus would live your actual life. The renovation of the heart is not adding religious activity to an already exhausting existence. It is exchanging your way of carrying life for His way. The result is rest, not burnout.*

Before You Move On

Journal: What have I learned about what God wants from me and for me? Has my picture of God shifted? Do I believe He actually delights in me? Where is there still resistance?

Part III: The Prophetic Promise of a New Heart

This is the center of the guide. Everything before has been leading here, and everything after flows from here. The prophets carry God’s most explicit promises about heart renovation — and they spoke them to people who had failed spectacularly. These promises are not for the put-together. They are for the broken and the exiled.

Reading 1: A Heart to Know Me — Jeremiah 24:1–10

God promises the exiles “a heart to know me, that I am the Lord.” The gift of a heart that can know God — not just know about Him — is the foundation of everything. Ask God: give me a heart to know You.

Reading 2: Plans for Your Wholeness — Jeremiah 29:1–14

Read the whole letter to the exiles. Verse 13: “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” The promise of finding God is tied to whole-hearted seeking. That is what you are doing right now.

Reading 3: The New Covenant — Jeremiah 31:31–34

Lectio Divina passage — spend at least three mornings here. One of the most important paragraphs in the entire Bible. The law will no longer be external — it will be written on the heart. This is the promise Jesus fulfills at the Last Supper. Read it slowly. Let it rewrite your assumptions about how God works.

Reading 4: One Heart, One Way — Jeremiah 32:37–41

“I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good.” And verse 41: “I will rejoice in doing them good... with all my heart and all my soul.” God gives His whole heart to the project of renovating yours.

Reading 5: The Fountain of Living Water — Jeremiah 2:1–13

“My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.” Every disordered attachment of the heart is a broken cistern. What broken cisterns are you drinking from?

Formation Note: *Lewis observed that our desires are not too strong but too weak. We settle for broken cisterns not because we want too much, but because we cannot imagine what the fountain of living water actually offers. Rolheiser names this same reality as the “holy longing” — a restlessness built into us by God that only He can satisfy.*

Reading 6: Heart of Flesh — Ezekiel 11:17–21

The first of Ezekiel's heart-of-flesh promises. Notice the sequence: God gathers, gives one heart, puts a new spirit within, removes the heart of stone, gives a heart of flesh — so that they may walk in His ways. The new heart is not the end; it is what makes the new life possible.

Reading 7: Get Yourselves a New Heart — Ezekiel 18:30–32

God says “get a new heart.” In chapter 36, He says “I will give you a new heart.” The tension between these two is the mystery of transformation: God commands what only He can provide. You must want it. He must do it.

Reading 8: The Central Promise — Ezekiel 36:22–32

Lectio Divina passage — this is the anchor passage of the entire guide. Spend as long as you need here. Notice the verbs — all in the first person, all God's action: I will sprinkle, I will give, I will remove, I will put. You do not renovate your own heart. God does it. Your job is to show up, to be willing, and to receive.

***Formation Note:** Willard's entire theology of transformation rests on this distinction: we do not produce transformation; we position ourselves to receive it. He called the spiritual disciplines “indirect means of grace” — practices that put us where God can do what only God can do. Your morning quiet time is not the renovation. It is the operating table where the Surgeon works.*

Reading 9: The Valley of Dry Bones — Ezekiel 37:1–14

Read this right after 36:22–32. God takes what is utterly dead and breathes life into it. Whatever feels dead in your heart — whatever you have given up on — bring it to this passage.

Reading 10: Rend Your Heart — Joel 2:12–17

Lectio Divina passage. “Rend your heart and not your garments.” God is not interested in external religious performance. He wants the interior. This is followed immediately by a reminder of God's character: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

Reading 11: Return to Psalm 51

Read it again after weeks of immersion in the prophetic promises. It will sound different. David's cry for a clean heart is no longer just a desperate prayer — it is a prayer that has an answer.

Reading 12: Where God Dwells — Isaiah 57:15 and 66:1–2

The high and exalted God dwells with the contrite and lowly in spirit. A renovated heart is not a perfect heart — it is a soft one, an open one, a humble one. This is the heart God makes His home in.

Reading 13: The Suffering Servant — Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Read slowly, knowing this describes Jesus. The servant carries our griefs and sorrows in His own heart. The new heart is possible because the servant's heart was broken for you.

Reading 14: The Spirit Poured Out — Isaiah 44:1–5

“I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring.” The same Spirit who gives the heart of flesh in Ezekiel 36 is poured out like water on thirsty ground. Where are you thirsty?

Reading 15: Wash Your Heart — Jeremiah 4:14

“Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem.” God is not thundering from a distance. He is leaning in, pleading. Let the prophetic promise of Ezekiel 36 — “I will sprinkle clean water on you” — be the answer to this plea.

Before You Move On

This may be the longest stage. Before moving on, spend a full morning in prayer and journaling. Write out the promises God has made about your heart. Ask Him which ones feel most alive to you. Listen. Then move forward.

Part IV: The Heart Made New in Jesus

Everything the prophets promised finds its fulfillment in Jesus. In this part, you are reading the Gospels not for information about Jesus but for encounter with Him. He is the one who makes the new heart possible, who shows you what a fully surrendered heart looks like, and who gives you access to everything the prophets described.

Reading 1: The Announcement — Luke 4:14–21

Jesus reads from Isaiah and says, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The prophecies are no longer future. The renovation has begun.

Reading 2: The Beatitudes — Matthew 5:1–12

Lectio Divina passage — spend at least three mornings. Each beatitude describes an interior condition of the heart that God blesses. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. These are descriptions of the kind of heart that is open to the kingdom.

Formation Note: *Willard spent much of The Divine Conspiracy unpacking the Beatitudes as Jesus’s description of who is available to the kingdom of God. The poor in spirit are people who have nothing left to rely on but God. Each beatitude is a doorway into the renovated heart.*

Reading 3: Heart-Level Righteousness — Matthew 5:17–48

Take at least three mornings. Jesus goes beneath behavior to the heart: not just “do not murder” but deal with your anger; not just “do not commit adultery” but deal with your lust. Journal on whichever one confronts you most directly.

Reading 4: Secret Devotion — Matthew 6:1–18

Giving, praying, fasting — all in secret. Jesus is dismantling the religious heart that performs for an audience. “Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Your morning quiet time is this hidden life. No one sees it. God sees it. That is enough.

Reading 5: Where Your Treasure Is — Matthew 6:19–24

Lectio Divina passage. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Your heart follows your treasure — not the other way around. What consumes your mental energy? Ask God to show you where your treasure actually is.

Reading 6: Ask, Seek, Knock — Matthew 7:7–12

An invitation to persistent, heart-level prayer. The posture of a heart that knows it cannot produce what it needs on its own.

Reading 7: Good Treasure, Bad Treasure — Luke 6:43–49

“Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” The fruit of your life reveals the condition of your heart. Pay attention to your words today. What do they reveal?

Reading 8: What Defiles — Mark 7:14–23

The real problem is not external contamination but what comes out of the heart. Read this alongside Jeremiah 17:9 and Ezekiel 36:26. Jesus is not just diagnosing the problem — He is the solution the prophets foretold.

Reading 9: The Parable of the Sower — Luke 8:4–15

Read this as a story about the heart. The seed is the same — the word of God. The variable is the soil. Your morning practice is the tilling of the soil. You are making your heart into good ground.

Reading 10: The Cost — Luke 9:23–27 and Luke 14:25–35

Jesus calls for total surrender. A renovated heart is not a comfortable heart. It is a heart that has died to its own agenda and come alive to God's. Read Galatians 2:20 here. Journal honestly about what you are still holding onto.

Reading 11: The Farewell Discourse — John 14–17

Take at least a full week. Jesus at His most intimate: the promise of the Spirit, abiding in the vine, love as the mark of a disciple, praying for unity with the Father.

Lectio Divina passages: John 14:1–7, John 14:15–27, John 15:1–11 (abiding), John 15:12–17, and John 17:20–26.

Reading 12: The Woman Who Loved Much — Luke 7:36–50

“Her many sins have been forgiven — as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” A renovated heart is one that has been deeply forgiven and responds with extravagant love.

Reading 13: Gethsemane — Matthew 26:36–46

Lectio Divina passage. “Not my will, but yours be done.” The ultimate picture of a surrendered heart. A heart so aligned with God that even in agony, it chooses trust. Ask the Spirit to form this same posture in you.

Reading 14: The Road to Emmaus — Luke 24:13–35

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures?” This is what happens in your mornings. The risen Christ opens the Scriptures and your heart burns. Pay attention to the burning.

Reading 15: Layer in Romans 12:1–2

“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice.” “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Notice it starts with “in view of God’s mercy.” The surrender comes from seeing how much you have been given, not from willpower.

Before You Move On

Journal: How has my understanding of Jesus deepened? Where is He asking me to surrender? What does “abiding” actually look like in my daily life?

Part V: The Spirit and the Ongoing Renovation

The Holy Spirit is the agent of heart renovation. He is the one the prophets pointed to, the one Jesus promised, and the one who now lives in you. You are not just reading about the Spirit here; you are asking Him to do in you what only He can do.

Reading 1: The Spirit Promised — Isaiah 11:1–5

The Spirit of the Lord, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord — the full equipment of a renovated heart. The Spirit who rested on Jesus now dwells in you. Journal about which of these aspects you feel most drawn to and which feels most lacking.

Reading 2: The Spirit and the New Covenant — Ezekiel 36:26–27 (revisit)

Read the anchor passage through the lens of the Spirit. “I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.” The Spirit is the Person who moves you from the inside. He makes the new heart operational.

Reading 3: Pentecost — Acts 2:1–41

The Spirit comes. The people are “cut to the heart.” This is the circumcision of the heart that Deuteronomy described — happening through the Spirit’s work.

Reading 4: The Heart of the Early Church — Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35

They were of “one heart and one soul.” A renewed heart is never only personal; it reshapes how you live with others.

Reading 5: The Heart God Opens — Acts 16:13–15

“The Lord opened her heart to pay attention.” The Lord opens hearts. He does it for you in your quiet time. Thank Him.

Reading 6: The Great Chapters — Romans 5–8

Read over two weeks. Suggested breakdown:

Romans 5:1–11 — Peace, hope, love poured out. Romans 6:1–14 — Dead to sin, alive to God.

Romans 7:14–25 — The honest struggle. Romans 8:1–11 — No condemnation. Romans 8:12–17 — Abba, Father. Romans 8:18–30 — The Spirit helps our weakness. Romans 8:31–39 — Nothing can separate.

Lectio Divina passages: Romans 5:1–5, Romans 8:1–6, Romans 8:14–17, Romans 8:26–28, Romans 8:31–39.

Formation Note: Willard taught that Romans 8 is not merely a theological treatise but a description of lived experience. The person who walks by the Spirit actually experiences no condemnation, actually has a mind set on life and peace, actually cries “Abba, Father” from the depths. Ask the Spirit to make these real.

Reading 7: God’s Love Poured Out — Romans 5:5 (extended meditation)

Lectio Divina — spend a full morning on this single verse. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” The love of God is not merely declared over you; it is poured into you.

Reading 8: Unveiled Faces — 2 Corinthians 3:1–18

Lectio Divina, especially verses 17–18. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” Beholding and becoming. You do not change yourself. You behold Him and the Spirit changes you.

Reading 9: The Inner Person Being Renewed — 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

Outwardly wasting away, inwardly being renewed day by day. The renovation happens even when — especially when — life is hard.

Formation Note: Lewis entitled his most famous sermon “The Weight of Glory” after this passage. God’s ultimate desire is not merely forgiveness but glorification — to be welcomed and delighted in by God Himself.

Reading 10: Fruit, Not Effort — Galatians 5:13–26

The fruit of the Spirit is the organic product of a heart yielded to the Spirit. Read the list slowly and ask which fruit He is growing in you right now.

Reading 11: Paul’s Prayers — Ephesians 1:15–23 and 3:14–21

Pray these prayers for yourself, out loud if you can. Paul prays for the eyes of the heart to be enlightened, for Christ to dwell in your heart through faith, for you to be rooted and grounded in love. These are Spirit-empowered prayers for heart renovation. Make them yours.

Reading 12: The Heart at Peace — Philippians 4:4–9

Lectio Divina passage. “The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts.” Now it is God’s peace that does the guarding, not your effort. Bring your anxieties to God and His peace will stand watch.

Reading 13: The Mind of Christ — Philippians 2:1–13

The great hymn of Christ's self-emptying. A renovated heart in action: humility, service, obedience, trust. And verse 13: "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work." Even the willing is His gift.

Reading 14: Put On the New Self — Colossians 3:1–17

Set your mind on things above. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Read this as a description of where God is taking you, not as a list of demands.

Reading 15: The Word Implanted — James 1:19–25

"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Your mornings of reading are the watering of that seed. But do not merely listen — be a doer.

Reading 16: The Word in the Heart — Psalm 119:9–16 and 119:105–112

Lectio Divina passage. "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Let these sections become your confession about what God's word has been doing in you through this guide.

Before You Move On

Journal: How is the Spirit working in me? What fruit am I beginning to see? Where do I still resist His work? Talk to the Holy Spirit directly — He is a Person, not a force.

Part VI: The Heart Applied — Marriage, Fatherhood, and Daily Life

You have traveled through the deep waters of Scripture and encountered the God who searches, desires, promises, fulfills, and renovates the heart. Now the renovation meets the place where it matters most: your home. The readings in this part are not a separate study. They are the natural next movement of everything you have been learning — the heart of flesh meeting the daily realities of being a husband and father.

This part is structured in four sections, each targeting a specific area where the renovated heart is tested and formed:

Section A — The Heart That Carries Too Much: for the man who has made himself responsible for everything.

Section B — The Heart That Controls: for the man whose strength becomes pressure.

Section C — The Heart of a Husband: for the man learning to lead with invitation, not intensity.

Section D — The Heart of a Father: for the man learning to be present more than perfect.

Formation Note: *Willard wrote that the greatest thing anyone can do for the people they love is to become a person who is deeply at peace with God. The readings in this part are not about adding more tasks to your life. They are about letting the renovation reach the rooms where your family lives.*

Section A: The Heart That Carries Too Much

Many men — especially those who grew up in homes marked by instability, addiction, or absence — learned early that if things are going to be okay, they need to make them okay. That adaptation produces tremendous strengths: discipline, drive, moral seriousness, dependability. But it also installs a belief deep in the heart that is not from God: “If I let go, everything falls apart.” This section is about letting Scripture speak to that belief.

Reading 1: Unless the Lord Builds the House — Psalm 127:1–2

Lectio Divina passage. “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves.” The word “vain” appears three times. The hyper-responsible heart rises early and stays up late believing that more effort equals more safety. God says the opposite. He grants sleep to those He loves. The ability to rest is not irresponsibility. It is trust.

Heart Check: *Where am I building, guarding, and toiling in ways that reveal I do not trust God to be the one holding my family together?*

Reading 2: Cast Your Anxiety — 1 Peter 5:6–7

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” The word “cast” implies a deliberate throwing. You have to actively release what you are carrying. The hyper-responsible heart struggles to cast because casting feels like abdicating. Peter says the opposite — it is humility. Trusting God with outcomes you cannot control is the deepest kind of strength.

Reading 3: Martha and Mary — Luke 10:38–42

Martha is doing good things. Jesus says only one thing is needed. The hyper-responsible heart becomes Martha without realizing it — so focused on making everything happen that it misses the one thing that matters: presence.

Heart Check: *When I am at a family gathering, am I with my family or am I running the gathering in my head?*

Reading 4: Do Not Be Anxious — Matthew 6:25–34

Jesus is not naive about needs. He is addressing the heart posture underneath the planning: anxiety. “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” Seek first the kingdom. Let tomorrow worry about itself.

Reading 5: My Grace Is Sufficient — 2 Corinthians 12:7–10

Lectio Divina passage. “My power is made perfect in weakness.” The hyper-responsible heart cannot accept this. It feels backwards. But this is the heart of the gospel applied to daily life. You do not need to be sufficient. God’s grace is.

Reading 6: Be Still — Psalm 46

Lectio Divina passage. The Hebrew for “be still” literally means “cease striving.” When the environment feels chaotic, your instinct is to tighten grip. God’s instruction is the opposite: let go and remember Me.

Reading 7: All Things Hold Together — Colossians 1:15–20

“In him all things hold together.” Not in you. In Him. Your family does not hold together because of your effort. It holds together because of Christ. This is not a reason to be passive. It is a reason to stop white-knuckling.

Section B: The Heart That Controls

Control anxiety is the nervous system’s response to unpredictability. What served as survival in childhood can wound the people around you as an adult. God wants to give you a different kind of safety: one that does not require controlling your environment.

Reading 1: The Fruit of the Spirit — Galatians 5:22–23

Lectio Divina passage. The last fruit listed is self-control — not environment-control, not people-control, not outcome-control. When things feel chaotic, the Spirit’s work is not to help you fix it. It is to produce peace and patience and gentleness inside you even while it’s messy.

Heart Check: *Which fruit of the Spirit is most lacking in me when I am triggered? Which one does my family need most from me right now?*

Reading 2: Slow to Speak, Slow to Anger — James 1:19–21

Control anxiety makes you fast — fast to assess, fast to correct, fast to intervene. James says the godly heart is slow. Slow to speak means you are not formulating your correction while the other person is still talking.

Reading 3: Not Lording Over — 1 Peter 5:1–4

Shepherd the flock — not domineering, but being examples. A shepherd leads. A lord controls. When you feel the impulse to correct and manage, ask: am I shepherding or am I lording?

Reading 4: Jesus Washes Feet — John 13:1–17

Lectio Divina passage. Jesus knew He had all authority. And knowing that, He knelt. Authority and humility together. The heart that has been given leadership does not need to grip it. It can kneel.

Formation Note: *Willard pointed out that Jesus’ power was never coercive. He led by presence, by invitation, by service. True authority never needs to announce itself. It serves, and others follow because they trust the heart behind the action.*

Reading 5: Love Does Not Insist — 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Lectio Divina passage. “Love does not insist on its own way.” The controlling heart always has a way things should go. Love releases the insistence. It does not stop caring. It stops demanding.

Reading 6: Blessed Are the Meek — Matthew 5:5

The Greek word for meek, *praus*, described a warhorse trained to respond to the lightest touch of the reins. Full power, fully submitted. God is not forming less strength in you. He is forming strength under the Spirit’s direction.

Section C: The Heart of a Husband

Marriage is the place where the deepest gifts and deepest wounds converge. A man can carry powerful vision for his family and simultaneously create pressure that pushes his wife away — not because his vision is wrong, but because the way he carries it is too heavy for the people around him. This section is about what Scripture says to the husband who is learning to lead with open hands.

Anchor Truth: *The stronger the vision, the more gently it must be carried. When vision is held with intensity, a wife will instinctively resist it — even if she agrees with the values. When vision is carried with peace, it becomes attractive.*

Reading 1: Love as Christ Loved — Ephesians 5:25–33

Lectio Divina passage — spend at least three mornings. Christ’s love for the church was sacrificial, not managerial. He gave Himself up for her. He nourishes and cherishes her. None of these verbs are about control, correction, or vision-casting. They are about sacrifice, tenderness, and patient care.

Heart Check: *When I think about “leading my wife,” what picture comes to mind? Is it closer to Christ washing the church or to a manager directing an employee?*

Reading 2: Live with Her in Understanding — 1 Peter 3:7

Peter says to live with your wife “according to knowledge” — meaning, study her. Understand her. Know what she is carrying. Are you living with her according to knowledge of her actual weight? Or are you adding to her load?

Reading 3: Invitation, Not Correction — John 1:35–42

Jesus’ first words to His first disciples: “Come and see.” Three words, no pressure. What if your invitation to your wife around family vision sounded more like “come and see” and less like “here is what we should be doing”?

Reading 4: Bear with One Another — Colossians 3:12–14

“Bear with each other and forgive one another.” The phrase “bear with” means to hold up under, to carry patiently. In a season of exhaustion and grief, bearing with your wife means carrying your disappointment without making it her problem.

Reading 5: The Tender Approach — Song of Solomon 2:10–15

The beloved says, “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.” This is invitation, not correction. What if spiritual leadership in this season looks less like casting vision and more like inviting your wife into moments of beauty and rest?

Reading 6: Two Are Better Than One — Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

A passage about partnership, not hierarchy. Your wife carries certain gifts. You carry different ones. The tension is not a sign of failure. It is a sign that two different people need to learn to carry the load together instead of resenting what the other is not carrying.

Reading 7: The Patient Farmer — James 5:7–8

The farmer does not dig up the seed to check if it is growing. He plants, waters, and waits. Your wife may be growing in ways you cannot see yet. Can you wait like the farmer?

Reading 8: Pray for Her — Ephesians 1:15–19 (applied)

Pray Paul's prayer specifically for your wife, by name, every morning for a week. Do not pray for her to change. Pray for her to be blessed. Watch what happens in your own heart.

Section D: The Heart of a Father

Many men father as a reaction to their own fathers — either repeating patterns or overcompensating against them. God wants to free you from both. He wants you to father from identity in Christ, not from compensation or fear.

Reading 1: The Father Runs — Luke 15:11–32

Lectio Divina passage — spend at least three mornings. Read this as a picture of how God fathers you. The father does not lecture, correct, or manage. He watches, waits, and runs. Let yourself be the son in this story before you try to be the father.

Heart Check: *Do I relate to God more as the running father or as the older brother — the one who has done everything right and feels unseen for it?*

Reading 2: As a Father Has Compassion — Psalm 103:8–14

Lectio Divina passage. “He knows how we are formed; he remembers that we are dust.” God's fatherhood is defined by compassion, not standards. He does not expect perfection from dust. He expects dependence.

Reading 3: Do Not Exasperate — Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21

Paul warns specifically about fathers creating exasperation and bitterness in their children. When standards are high and grace is low, children feel evaluated rather than loved. What is the emotional temperature of your home when you walk through the door?

Reading 4: Like Children — Matthew 18:1–5

Your children are not just people you are forming. They are models of the heart God is forming in you. Their dependency, trust, and ability to be fully present — these are pictures of what God wants from your heart.

Reading 5: The Prince of Peace — Isaiah 9:6–7

The Messianic Father is the Prince of Peace. His authority and peace are not in tension. When you walk into a room, does the emotional temperature go up or down?

Reading 6: The Steady Presence — Deuteronomy 31:6–8

“The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” The foundation of Moses’ charge to Joshua is not competence but presence. Your children need a present father more than a perfect one.

Applied: Four Movements for the Heart at Home

The readings above speak to the broad posture of a husband and father. These four movements go deeper into the specific mechanism that creates the most daily tension in marriage and family: unexamined expectations. They are designed to be worked through over several weeks, with journaling and honest self-examination.

Anchor Truth: *Unexamined expectations create frustration. Shared priorities create unity. Released preferences create peace.*

Movement 1: The Unexamined Heart

Before you can sort your expectations, you have to see them. Most of what drives tension in family moments is not conscious — it operates below the waterline.

Key readings: Psalm 139:23–24 (asking God to show you the specific expectations you carry), Matthew 7:1–5 (the plank is the unexamined intensity that distorts how you see everything), Proverbs 12:25 (anxiety weighs down the heart), Hebrews 4:12–13 (the word discerning the intentions underneath your intentions).

Heart Check: *What if the thing I most want to correct in my family is actually a mirror showing me something about my own heart that God wants to address first?*

Movement 2: The Sorted Heart

Not everything that matters to you matters equally. But the activated nervous system treats every departure from the vision as the same level of threat. The work is to hold few things tightly and many things with open hands.

Key readings: Luke 10:38–42 (the one thing needed vs. the many things), Matthew 6:31–34 (seek first the kingdom), Philippians 3:7–11 (counting everything as loss for knowing Christ), 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (love keeps no record of wrongs).

Anchor Truth: *If everything is a 10, nothing is a 10. The heart that cannot release preferences will eventually crush the people it loves with the weight of its own standards.*

Movement 3: The Communicated Heart

A sorted heart that remains silent is still a trap. The few things that truly matter need to be shared with your wife — not as corrections but as vulnerabilities.

Key readings: Isaiah 1:18 (God choosing invitation over command), Ephesians 4:15–16 (truth in love), Hosea 2:14–16 (God leading with tenderness), Proverbs 25:11 (a word fitly spoken), Romans 12:10 (prefer one another).

Movement 4: The Present Heart

Showing up to the actual moment without an internal script for how it should go. This is the hardest movement because it requires the nervous system to be at peace in the middle of imperfection.

Key readings: Psalm 118:24 (this messy day is the one God made), Matthew 6:28–30 (the lilies that don't perform), Philippians 4:6–9 (the peace that guards), Luke 22:14–20 (Jesus giving thanks at an imperfect table), Ephesians 2:4–7 (you are already seated).

Anchor Truth: *Your kids will not remember whether everyone sat still at dinner. They will remember whether their father was peaceful.*

The Question That Changes Everything

In every family moment, ask yourself: is this a culture-building moment or a love-my-wife moment? Sometimes those overlap. Sometimes they do not. In seasons of grief, exhaustion, and young children, loving your wife well IS the culture you are building.

A Note on Grief and Healing

Many men entering this guide are carrying unprocessed grief — from their own childhood, from losses in their family, from the gap between the father they had and the father they want to be. A renovated heart is not one that has moved past pain. It is one that has learned to bring pain to God rather than burying it or performing over the top of it.

Key readings: Psalm 34:18 (the Lord is close to the brokenhearted), Matthew 5:4 (blessed are those who mourn), 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (comfort others with the comfort you've received), Psalm 147:3 (He heals the brokenhearted), John 11:33–36 (Jesus wept).

If this section surfaces things that go deeper than a journaling exercise, consider talking to a discipler, a trusted friend, or a counselor. Healing sometimes requires another human being to be present with you in the pain.

Part VII: Living from the New Heart

You have traveled a long way. You have seen the condition of the heart, the desire of God, the prophetic promises, the fulfillment in Jesus, the ongoing work of the Spirit, and how the renovation meets your daily life as a husband and father. Now you close with what the renovated life looks like in practice — and in eternal hope.

Formation Note: Augustine wrote near the end of his *Confessions* that the purpose of the whole spiritual life is to be so formed by God's love that we can truly say, "Love, and do what you will" — because when the heart is fully renovated, the will is aligned with God's. This is where the journey leads: not to more rules, but to a heart so saturated with love that it naturally does what love requires.

Reading 1: The Letter of James

Read all five chapters, one per morning. James describes what a renovated heart produces in practice: patience in trials, taming the tongue, wisdom from above, humility, prayer.

Reading 2: Abiding — 1 John

Read in full over a week. John circles love, light, abiding, assurance. A renovated heart is not a fearful heart. It has assurance because it knows it is loved.

Lectio Divina passages: 1 John 3:19–24 ("God is greater than our heart") and 1 John 4:7–19 ("We love because he first loved us").

Reading 3: The Obedient Heart — 1 Peter 1:13–25

"Love one another earnestly from a pure heart." The renovated heart is not just clean; it is warm.

Reading 4: The Gentle and Quiet Spirit — 1 Peter 3:3–4

The heart God finds beautiful in anyone: "the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." This is what Psalm 131 looks like lived out.

Reading 5: The Purified Heart — Acts 15:8–9

God "cleansed their hearts by faith." The heart is cleansed not by effort but by faith.

Reading 6: Psalms of Trust

Over two weeks, read one per morning:

Psalm 16, 23, 27, 34, 37:1–11, 42–43, 46, 62, 63, 73, 84, 103.

Reading 7: Psalm 131

Lectio Divina — spend multiple mornings. Three verses. “I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother.” A heart at rest. A heart that has stopped striving. A heart that is home.

Formation Note: *The weaned child is not at the breast seeking nourishment — it is simply resting with the mother because the mother is enough. This is “disinterested love” — wanting the Beloved for Himself, not for what He gives.*

Reading 8: Confidence to Draw Near — Hebrews 10:19–25

Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith. You can enter God’s presence with confidence — not because of your performance but because of what Christ has done.

Reading 9: The Discipline of a Father — Hebrews 12:1–13

God disciplines those He loves. Even the hard things are renovation. The fruit is peace.

Reading 10: Strengthened in the Inner Being — Ephesians 3:14–21 (revisit)

Return to Paul’s prayer one final time. Let it be your benediction over this entire guide. Ask God to do exceedingly, abundantly more than all you ask or imagine.

Reading 11: The End of the Story — Revelation 21–22

Finish here. “God’s dwelling place is now among the people.” No more tears. The river of life. The face of God. This is where the renovation is headed — full, permanent intimacy with the God who started this work in you.

Lectio Divina: Revelation 21:1–7. Let this vision of the end shape how you live now. The renovation is real. It will be finished.

Closing Practice

When you have finished, spend a final morning in reflection. Go back through your journal from the past months. Look at what God has done. Write a letter to Him — not a prayer list, just a letter from your heart to His. Thank Him. Tell Him what has changed. Ask Him to keep going.

Then take a breath. Rest. And when you are ready, return to the Scriptures — wherever God leads you next — with a different heart than the one you had before.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
— Philippians 1:6