

STUDY GUIDE  
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

SIX SESSIONS

BESTSELLING AUTHOR WITH OVER 5 MILLION BOOKS SOLD

# SHEILA WALSH



## THE LONGING IN ME



How Everything You Crave  
Leads *to the* Heart of God

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SESSION ONE

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# Longing to Be Chosen

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in  
this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation  
is that I was made for another world.

C. S. Lewis, *Made for Heaven*

## Welcome!

Welcome to Session 1 of *The Longing in Me*. If this is your first time together as a group, take a moment to introduce yourselves to one another before watching the video. Then let's begin!

### Video: Longing to Be Chosen (19 minutes)

Play the video segment for Session 1. As you watch, use the outline provided to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

#### Notes

“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”

—*T. S. Eliot*

The human heart longs for closure and understanding. It longs to change the ending of those things in our lives that have scarred us badly.

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David was known as “a man after God’s own heart,” yet he made choices that cost him and others dearly.

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We all long to be chosen. But when those longings are unmet, what do we do? Even more, when those longings *are* met, why is there an even greater ache that remains? ... No matter how great your longing is for God, it will never, ever compare to His longing for you.

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“God chose the things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important” (1 Corinthians 1:28). These words exactly describe David, the man God chose to be king over Israel (see 1 Samuel 13:14).

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We're drawn by charisma more than character. But charisma cracks under pressure, while character doesn't.

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The God who created you has chosen you as His beautifully loved daughter. Because of that, you can take rejections in your life in stride.

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## Group Discussion (39 minutes)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

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### Betrayed by Longing

2. Sheila pointed out that our high school years often rank near the top of the scale when it comes to intensity and longing. She described herself as an “awkward girl” in this season of her life and shared a painful story about how “popular girls” used her longings to torment her. As you reflect on this same era in your own life, which of the following high school stereotypes come closest to describing you? Place a check mark next to your top two or three.

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|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prep/preppie | <input type="checkbox"/> Dweeb/dork       | <input type="checkbox"/> Metalhead            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nerd         | <input type="checkbox"/> Popular (A-list) | <input type="checkbox"/> Loner                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Star athlete | <input type="checkbox"/> Popular (B-list) | <input type="checkbox"/> Invisible girl       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loser        | <input type="checkbox"/> Cheerleader      | <input type="checkbox"/> Rebel                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Punk         | <input type="checkbox"/> Band geek        | <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed girl       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goth         | <input type="checkbox"/> Freak            | <input type="checkbox"/> Fat girl             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good girl    | <input type="checkbox"/> Indie girl       | <input type="checkbox"/> Skinny girl          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mean girl    | <input type="checkbox"/> Slacker          | <input type="checkbox"/> Drama nerd           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fashionista  | <input type="checkbox"/> Artist/musician  | <input type="checkbox"/> Super-spiritual girl |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overachiever | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry girl       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stoner       | <input type="checkbox"/> Party girl       |   |

- Stereotypes can be true to a point, but they can also obscure truth. In what ways do the words and phrases you checked represent something genuinely true about your high school self? In what ways do they also obscure something true about who you were?

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- How would you describe the deeper or hidden longings behind the words and phrases you checked? For example, the deeper longing behind being the overachiever might be a need for significance, affirmation, or self-worth. The hidden longing behind being the fat or skinny girl might be a need to be seen as desirable or to be noticed for something other than body size.

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- In what ways might the longings you described also be an expression of the desire to be seen and chosen?

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- Sheila described the devastation she felt when she realized what the popular girls at the dance had done. She was angry at everyone, but most of all, she said, “I was angry with myself . . . my longing had betrayed me.” In what ways, if any, do you relate to this response? How would you describe the purpose of punishing or blaming ourselves (or our longings) when we are hurt by someone else?

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## Heart Choices

3. As the youngest of eight sons, David was up against a big stereotype—the no-account little brother. And while it was true that David was last by birth order and therefore considered least by most people—including his father and brothers—the stereotype also obscured a larger truth about who David really was: “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). We get a better understanding of what this statement about David’s heart really means by listening in on a heated conversation between the prophet Samuel and King Saul, who has blatantly disregarded a command from God:

Samuel said, “What is this you have done?”

Saul replied, “I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn’t arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, ‘The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven’t even asked for the LORD’s help!’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came.”

“How foolish!” Samuel exclaimed. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart. The LORD has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.” (1 Samuel 13:11–14)

When deep need alone is the driving force behind our choices, we’re almost guaranteed to end up in a place we’d rather not be—a ditch or worse. Seeing how this plays out with Saul is not difficult. First, he rationalizes his behavior by pointing out his dire circumstances, and then he skirts responsibility for his foolish choices by blaming Samuel. Saul essentially says, *Look, things around here have been going downhill fast. If you’d shown up when you were supposed to, I wouldn’t have been forced to take matters into my own hands. I didn’t want to do it, but you left me no choice.*

Now contrast this illustration of Saul’s heart with the apostle Paul’s description of David:

God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, “I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.” (Acts 13:22)

- Based on the passages from 1 Samuel 13 and Acts 13, how would you characterize the differences between Saul’s heart and David’s heart?

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- What does it mean in practical terms to be a person “after God’s own heart”? In other words, in the course of everyday life, what thoughts or behaviors are a tip-off that you are or are not living as a person after God’s own heart?

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- Saul is actually somewhat of a sympathetic character in this story. Given the same circumstances, most of us wouldn’t consider it unreasonable or sinful to show fear or to take action. The problem came when Saul put his deep needs in the driver’s seat. Saul *did* have a choice—he could have looked to *God* to meet his needs. Instead, he chose to meet his needs on his own terms without regard for God.

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- In what ways do you relate to Saul? In what circumstances are you most likely to make choices that effectively say to God, *Look, I have a hard situation here, and since You’re not coming through for me in the way I’d hoped or as quickly as I’d hoped, I don’t have any choice but to take matters into my own hands?*

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- How would you describe the ditch you end up in—the familiar place you’d rather not be—when your deep needs or longings are in the driver’s seat of your choices? What is the lesson you can’t seem to learn about this area of your life?

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4. In 1 Samuel 13 we learn something about the difference between Saul’s heart and David’s heart. In 1 Samuel 16 we learn about the difference between another pair of hearts—the human heart and God’s heart. In rejecting Eliab, David’s visibly impressive eldest brother, God says to Samuel:

The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.  
(1 Samuel 16:7)

Understanding the meaning of the word *heart* helps us to grasp the significance of this statement. We tend to think of the heart primarily in connection with emotions, but the ancient Hebrew understanding of heart was both broader and richer. To speak of the heart was to refer to the “entire inner life of a person”<sup>1</sup>—everything we might describe as psychological, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional. In its purest state, the heart was the bright and unique essence of who God created a person to be.

- It was no secret to God that David would one day make choices that cost him and others dearly, and yet He still chose David and deemed him “a man after my own heart.” How does the ancient Hebrew concept of heart help you understand something about what God saw when He looked at David’s heart? About what He sees when He looks at your heart?

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- In what ways does this truth that the Lord looks at the heart both challenge you and encourage you?

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5. In the video, Sheila described how God has already chosen you—a choice based on His heart of love and longing for you. “No matter how great your longing is for God,” Sheila said, “it will never, ever compare to His longing for you.”

Take a moment to reflect on both your longing for God and on God’s longing for you. How would you describe your awareness of both?

- ***Your longing for God.*** When are you most aware of your longing for God? Is your longing for God the strongest it has ever been, the weakest, or somewhere between? Why?

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- ***God’s longing for you.*** Author Brennan Manning writes, “Christians find it easier to believe that God exists than that God loves them.”<sup>2</sup> To what degree might this be true of you? When are you, or when have you been, most aware of God’s longing for you?

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## Hearts Together

6. In addition to studying together, it's important to also be aware of how God is at work among you — especially in how you relate to one another and share your lives throughout the study. In each session, you will have many opportunities to speak life-giving—and life-challenging—words and to listen to one another deeply.

As you anticipate the next several weeks of learning together in community, what request would you like to make of the group? For example, how do you hope other members will challenge you or encourage you? Use one or more of the sentence starters below, or your own statement, to help the group understand the best way to be a good friend to you throughout this study. As each person responds, use the two-page chart that follows to briefly note what is important to that person and how you can be a good friend to her during your discussions and times together.

*I'd like you to consistently challenge me about ...*

*It really helps me to engage in a group when ...*

*I tend to withdraw or feel anxious when ...*

*You can help me to take this study seriously by ...*

*In our discussions, the best thing you could do for me is ...*

Name	The Best Way I Can Be a Good Friend to This Person Is ...

Name	The Best Way I Can Be a Good Friend to This Person Is ...

## Individual Activity: What I Want to Remember (2 minutes)

Complete this activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

*What I want to remember from this session . . .*

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### Practice: Look for Longing

Each session in *The Longing in Me* study includes a practice for you to complete between sessions. Although the practice is completed on your own and outside of group time, reading through the practice description before concluding your meeting each week is a good idea. In some cases, activities may require preparation or setting aside time each day to complete. To get the most out of the practice, it's important not to hurry or try to complete activities at the last minute.

The practice for this week is to increase your awareness of longings—both your own longings and God's longing for you. While some desires and longings are obvious or could even be overwhelming, others are sometimes shy or hidden from view. But every desire has within it the potential to teach us something about our longings for God and about God's longing for us.

To be aware of something is to be attentive to it—to listen, watch, and observe. To be attentive to our longings—especially the shy ones—we must be respectful, which means we observe without making judgments and without shaming. The invitation of this practice is to set aside time to simply notice, which is the first step toward gaining understanding. Here are two options for ways to be attentive to longings between now and your next group meeting.

- ***Set aside fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of each day this week to reflect on the previous twenty-four hours.*** Divide the day into three parts—morning, afternoon, and evening. For each part of the day, look for any signs of desire or longing at work. Evidence might be obvious, or it could be found in something very small or subtle. For example, you might notice a desire either to be with or to avoid a certain person, to acquire a possession, to eat something, to change your circumstances. Or you might consistently find your mind dwelling on something you are either looking forward to or dreading—the upcoming weekend, a romantic date, a difficult conversation, a medical appointment. Desires are contained within all of these things.

Use a journal or pad of paper to write down at least one or two observations about your desires for each part of the day—morning, afternoon, and evening. For example, *I'm really looking forward to having time off. I hope the medical report brings good news. I don't want to feel lonely anymore. I wish I could sense God's presence right now.* If you find it challenging to make these observations after the fact, consider keeping your pad of paper with you and writing down your observations as they happen throughout the day. At the end of the week, review your daily observations. What stands out most to you about your desires? In what ways do these desires reflect something true about you? About your longing for God? About God's longing for you?

- ***Set aside thirty minutes to identify your longings and desires by giving yourself permission to dream.*** At some point in life, most of us wish we had a magic wand we could wave to swiftly and painlessly change our lives. If you could do this, what would you change—about yourself, your relationships (with God and others), your circumstances, etc.? Use a journal or notepad to write down every desire that comes to mind, however small. And don't rush! Allow at least twenty minutes to ponder what you really want, knowing that some desires may be shy or hidden. Then spend at least ten minutes reflecting on what you wrote. What stands out most to you about your desires? In what ways do these desires reflect something true about you? About your longing for God? About God's longing for you?

Bring your notes to the next group gathering. You'll have a chance to talk about your experiences and observations at the beginning of the Session 2 discussion.

## Closing Prayer

Close your time together with prayer.

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SESSION ONE

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# Personal Study



## Read and Learn

Read the introduction and chapter 1 of *The Longing in Me*. Use the space below to note any insights or questions you want to bring to the next group session.

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## Study and Reflect

The innate longing to be loved and chosen can lead us into very damaging situations... We know that God loves us, but we can't see God with our eyes or feel His arms around us or hear His audible voice telling us that we are loved. So we look for that kind of love and acceptance in someone [or something] else.

*The Longing in Me*, pages 6, 11



1. Use the prompts below to briefly identify a few circumstances in which your longing to be loved and chosen led you into damaging situations. They could be situations resulting from your own choices, or from circumstances over which you had little or no control.

*Two of the earliest situations that come to mind are . . .*

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*Two of the more recent situations that come to mind are . . .*

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Sheila writes, “The human heart longs for closure and understanding. In many ways it longs to right the wrongs of childhood . . . to change the ending of something that has scarred us badly” (page xiii). As you reflect on the situations you just identified, how would you describe the “closure and understanding” you hope for, or the ending(s) you’re trying to change?

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2. Sometimes it helps to understand our longings when we put them in the form of a question. For example, the question behind a longing to be loved might be, *Am I lovable?* The question behind a longing to be chosen might be, *Am I special?* As you consider your responses to question 1, which of the questions in the list on the following page come closest to articulating the longings that either led you into those damaging situations or came about because of them? Place a check mark next to your top two or three.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I lovable?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Do I measure up?                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I special?                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Will I be loved if I make a mistake? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I loved unconditionally?       | <input type="checkbox"/> Do I matter?                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I safe?                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Am I needed?                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do my needs matter?               | <input type="checkbox"/> Is my life meaningful?               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Will people like me or accept me? | <input type="checkbox"/> Am I worthy of love?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I a good person?               | <input type="checkbox"/> Is it okay to be me?                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do I belong?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Am I good enough?                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Will I be chosen?                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Am I desirable?                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I okay?                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Am I interesting?                 |   |

In the group session video, Sheila shared the story of Mary, who grew up with an unreliable father. The question behind Mary’s longing to be loved was, *Am I enough?* Through her young adult years, her efforts to bring closure to this question led her to repeatedly choose men who didn’t keep their word. Over and over again, the only answer to her question seemed to be, *No, I am not enough.* As a result, Mary saw herself as damaged goods—she felt defeated, stuck, and unlovable.

As you reflect on the questions you checked, what answers have you arrived at? How have your attempts to bring closure impacted the way you see yourself?

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The God of the universe has already chosen you and says to you, “You are Mine!”

*The Longing in Me, page 16*

3. God sees you—the person you are and the person He created you to be—and He chooses you. That’s good news, right? But maybe you find yourself thinking something like this: *There’s nothing special about being chosen if everyone is chosen. If God loves us all equally, then I’m just part of the crowd and there isn’t anything unique about how God loves me.* Author C. S. Lewis provides a compelling alternative to this line of thinking. Even though God loves all His children *equally*—to infinity and beyond—that doesn’t mean God loves us all *the same*. Lewis writes:

I am considering not how, but why, [God] makes each soul unique. If he had no use for all these differences, I do not see why he should have created more souls than one. . . .

As part of his reasoning, Lewis references the Lord’s compelling promise of an individualized heavenly reward: “I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). This is a gift from God that no one in the universe but you will receive! Lewis concludes:

Each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the Divine beauty better than any other creature can. Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love each differently? . . . If all experienced God in the same way and returned to him an identical worship, the song of the Church triumphant would have no symphony, it would be like an orchestra in which all the instruments played the same note.<sup>3</sup>

What impact does Lewis’s perspective have on your understanding of what it means that God chooses you and loves you differently than He loves anyone else?

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