

PSALM ONE

TITLE: Digging down to the Roots

TEXT: Psalm 1:1-3

THEME: Successful Christian Living

SPEAKERS PURPOSE: I am going to instruct my audience to successfully live the Christian life.

PROPOSITION: Every child of God can live a successful Christian life.

INTERROGATIVE: How can a believer successfully live the Christian life?

TRANSITION: The believer can live the successful Christian life by applying these principles to his life.

I. He must be Separated from the World..."that walketh not." (vs. 1)

A. He does not accept the advice of the world..walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. (vs.1)

Explanation: His mental processes are not guided by worldly principle but by the Word of God.

Argument

1. Counsel – advice, thinking process.
A reflection on his thinking
2. Walk – to order one's life by

B. He does not associate with the actions of the world..."standeth not in the way of sinners." (vs. 1)

Explanation: He does not live the lifestyle or practice the habits of the world.

Argument

1. Way – lifestyle; manner of life; practices.
A reflection of his behavior.
2. Stand – to allow oneself to be drawn into; to participate in/ to be in the presence of

C. He does not adopt the attitudes of the world..."nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (vs. 1)

Explanation: He does not establish himself in the doctrine of the world.

Argument

1. Seat of the scornful – The philosophy of those who have consciously rejected God.
A reflection on his belonging.
2. Sit – To establish residence; to take up lodging; to wholeheartedly accept and promote the doctrine of

II. He is saturated in the Word of God..."but his delight is in the law of the LORD." (vs. 2)

A. He loves the Word of God. "His delight is in..." (vs. 2)

Explanation: He has an intense desire to live for God's law.

Argument

1. Delight – to take supreme satisfaction; to take joy; to fulfill one's desires by
2. Law – God's complete message to man
3. His desires are fulfilled by this Word and his needs are met.

B. He lives the Word of God..."and in this law doth he meditate day and night" (vs. 2)

Explanation: He intensely desires to learn and apply the Word of God to his life.

Argument

1. Meditate – To ponder; to dissect; to examine with the intent of understanding and applying.
2. Time of Meditation – Night and day; A continual process of examination implying application.
3. Result of Meditation – Stability and success in life

III. He must be situated in the Work of God. . ."and he shall be like a tree." (vs. 3)

A. He is a planted Christian. "like a tree planted." (vs. 3)

Explanation: He has been carefully chosen and firmly established by God.

Argument

1. A Planter is implied by the word "plant."
2. The tree is located where it could receive nutrition.
3. Plant – to carefully place; to be firmly established (planted)

B. He is a productive Christian..."that bringeth forth his fruit in his season." (vs. 3)

Explanation: He fulfills his purpose – to bring forth fruit; to do good works

Argument

1. He produces in his proper season.
2. He brings forth his fruit to maturity.

C. He is perpetual Christian..."his leaf also shall not wither." (vs. 3)

Explanation: His life is a consistent example of Christ-likeness.

Argument

1. He will never wither in his fruitfulness.
2. He receives nutrition from an unfailing source; the Word of God. It is God's responsibility to care for the tree.

D. He is a prosperous Christian..."and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." (vs. 3)

Explanation: His life will not be lived in vain.

Argument

1. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous (vs. 6)
Knoweth – to take a deep interest in; to watch the life of

2. Prosper – To accomplish a purpose; to abundantly succeed; not to have labored in vain.

The Roads of Life

Text: Psalm 1:1-6

Intro: Book of Psalms is very familiar book

- Designed to show us God's pattern of praise and prayer
- Not written from the comforts of a desk or from the security of a classroom—but from the market place of life! {read quote}
- We all can identify with these men as they went through the experiences of life—just like we do!
- Who has not received comfort from the words of Ps 23—Lord is my shepherd I shall not want?
- Who has not been reassured by the words “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding—in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.
- Who has not cried out for forgiveness as David—have mercy upon me O God according to thy loving kindness!

Of all Ps other than 23—Ps 1 is probably most familiar—stands as an introduction to the whole book! It does 2 things:

1. Declares a single truth: there are two paths in life and everyone must decide which path he will take.
 2. Implied conclusion: Only those who choose the right path will be able to follow God's pattern for praise and worship—and receive blessing.
- Well—If only I knew which path was the right one—I would have no trouble! Psalm 1 describes both paths, shows the directions they go in, will show you the destination they will take you to! One leads to rejoicing and one leads to ruin!
 - You are on one path or the other—Which path are you on?

I. The Road to Rejoicing: Godly life (1-3)

- Verse 1 starts by describing the man who chooses this road as *blessed*.
- *Blessed*: the happinesses! The abundance of happiness—the extreme good fortune!
- This word used in I Kings 10:8 when the Queen of Sheba heard a report of the fabulous wealth and famed wisdom of Solomon and came to see with her own eyes. Overwhelmed by what she saw she exclaimed, *It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless, I did not believe the reports until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard!* Clearly she was overwhelmed—even the rumors as great as they were did not do the truth justice! Then she comments, *How **blessed** are your men, how **blessed** are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom!* (How privileged, how extremely fortunate—Oh, the happinesses of your servants...) That is the idea conveyed here—Oh, the extreme good fortune, the supreme happinesses of the man who chooses to walk this road in life!
- David goes on in the rest of verse 1 and up through verse 3 to describe the details of living your life on this road: What is it that causes a man to have such fortune and happiness in life? How does one get on this road?
- These verses teach us that this kind of happiness only comes to those who choose to live a pure and righteous life before God—and it starts with:

A. Starts by rejecting sin: vs 1 Rejects spiritual compromise with evil—separates himself from sin. This involves 3 key things:

1. **Blessed Man rejects the advice of the world:** It starts in your thinking! It involves a different mindset!

Does not walk in the council of the ungodly:

- Walk: here is a reference to the manner of living—the habits of life.

- Council: advice, the thinking pattern. Advice is given on the basis of a mindset or thinking pattern.
- Ungodly: this is a reference to those who live their life without God. It refers to those who are careless, lax in moral conduct—and even to those who may be outwardly moral but they have simply left God out of the picture of their life!
(Called Ungodly because from a practical standpoint—they live their life as if there were no God. They may claim to believe in God with their lips—but their life is lived with absolutely no thought for him)
- The first step in rejecting sin involves rejecting the advice or mindset of those who have left God out of the picture of their lives!
- It involves a different way of thinking but it also involves a different lifestyle:

2. Blessed Man rejects the actions of the world:

nor stands in the way of sinners!

- Stands: to stop, to take one's place, to reside.
- Way: Path, marked and precise manner of living (similar to the idea behind walk—to live your life)
- Sinners: (missing mark—archers) two basic ideas in this word:
 - Those whose occupation is sin—missing God's mark
 - Those who habitually live in sin—miss God's mark
- Supreme happiness involves not just a different mindset but also a different lifestyle—He does not stop and engage in the activities and lifestyle of those who have missed the mark of God's righteousness—the sinners! His life/actions are different than the world!
- It involves a different mindset, and lifestyle, but it also involves a different value system!

3. Blessed Man rejects the attitudes of the world: a different value system *nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful!*

- Sit: implies permanent association with something. To become a part of something.
- Seat: habitation, permanent position
- Scornful: those who are beyond hope—not just deniers of God—Defiers of God! Those who are actively engaged in promoting all forms of blasphemy against God and who have permanently positioned themselves against righteousness!
- Their lives and actions are directed by a permanent value system that defies the God of heaven—The Godly man will not associate himself with this type of individual or with his value system!
- In other words—Righteous living that produces supreme happiness starts with a firm commitment to avoid every form of evil! It involves living your life with a different mindset, lifestyle, and value system than those of the world around you!
- Some of you may say—well, I don't think I need to take it that far—I mean I don't want to get fanatical or anything!
 - Illustration of what happens to a man who refuses to change his mindset, lifestyle, and value system: LOT! Look at the story—Gen 13.
 - **Verse 11** *So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.* Lot walked away from the council of his Godly uncle Abraham and chose to listen to the mindset of those who had forgotten God! **He walked in the council of the ungodly** and look where it led him!

- **Verse 12-13** *Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the Lord!* Lot came and began to live among the Sodomites—**He stood in the way of sinners.** 2 chapters later we see where Lot ended up...
- **19:1** *Now the two angels of the Lord came to Sodom in the evening as Lot was sitting in the Gate of Sodom.* He had come to associate himself with those who mocked and rebelled against the God of heaven! They were actively promoting wickedness and sin and even now the angels of the Lord were coming to judge the city and when they arrived—**they found Lot sitting in the seat of the scornful!** (how different from Joseph who ran from the advice of Potiphar's wife—who refused to live the lifestyle of the wicked and who lived his life according to the value system set forth by his God!

(Well, how can I keep up this type of life—It is so hard to live a Godly and pure life!!)

B. Maintained by responding to the scriptures: vs 2

His delight is in the law of the Lord and in this law does he meditate day and night!

- It involves a love for God's word: Delight—to take pleasure
- It involves a learning of God's word: Meditate—to muse, place one's mind upon! It is a study word! Intense concentration to the point of being oblivious to external things (Lion—moaning over prey)
- It involves a living out of God's word: day and night
Something that is to take place every day—all day long!
 - In other words if your desire to live differently from the world (different mindset, lifestyle, and value system) then you must be committed to an intense loving and learning of God's word so that it becomes second nature to you (Basketball player)
- When God's word becomes second nature to you it will be lived out.

C. Results in rejoicing: vs 3 *You shall be like a tree!*

- Note the results of avoiding sin and delighting in God's word—you will become stable and prosperous like a tree!
- Note that God promises that you will **BE** something rather than **doing** something! 4 treelike qualities that will come into the life of a man who chooses to walk through life on this road:
 - 1. Planted: Fortified**—stable, with deep roots!
 - Unrighteous are unstable and are like brush!
 - 2. Productive: Fruitful**
 - Productive life—will bring forth lasting fruit in God's kingdom
 - 3. Permanent: Firm, Faithful**
 - When the trials and droughts of life come—this man's leaf will not wither! He will survive the storms and buffetings of life!
 - (Have you ever seen someone go through a deep tragedy—disease or death and wonder how they were able to go on living? Answer: They are people whose leaf hasn't been withered by the storms of life!
 - 4. Prosperous: Fulfilled**
 - Idea here is that of fulfillment—contentment. Fulfilling the goal that God has designed for your life!

But as attractive as this road is the psalmist points out that there is a second road that one can choose as he goes through life—the road to ruin!

II. The Road to Ruin: Godless life (4-6)

- Note the contrast that the Psalmist makes: NOT SO the wicked!
- He has just told us that the Godly man on the road to supreme rejoicing is a man who rejects sin (different mindset, lifestyle, value system), he is a man who responds to scripture, and he is described as a firm, fruitful, prosperous tree! Then in verse four he starts off by issuing a very strong declaration about the other road—NOT SO!
- The wicked are not blessed with supreme blessing like the righteous
- They do not avoid sin or respond to God's word!
- Instead of being like a tree—they are like the chaff!
- In other words—this road is entirely opposite the road of the righteous—It goes in a completely different direction (away from God) and it arrives at a completely different destination (ruin!)

A. Starts by rebelling in sin:

- Verse 1 tells us that the Godly—Blessed man rejects the council, the way, and the seat of the world!
- Verse 4 tells us that the man who chooses this path does exactly the opposite—rather than reject sin—he revels in it!
- Note the word *wicked*: It is the same word ungodly in vs 1. It refers to someone who lives his life as if there were not God!
- A person who chooses to walk this road is described as Godless-without God! He has a different mindset, lifestyle, and value system than what God demands!
- Many claim to believe in God—even sti in church this AM but in their mindset, lifestyle, and value system—they are living as if there were no GOD!

B. Maintained by a rejection of scriptures:

Where the righteous man loves the word of God and learns its precepts so that he might live them out in his life—Those who choose to walk this road are described as those who reject God's word and refuse to abide by its precepts and instructions.

C. Results in ruin:

- The Blessed man in vs 3 is described as a prosperous tree-verse 3 describes the wicked as worthless chaff!
- Chaff; the external husk that surrounded the grain. At harvest they would place the grain in large flat trays and toss it high up into the air—the wind would blow the chaff away from the grain and since the grain was heavier it would fall back on the tray.
- Chaff was absolutely worthless-could not even be used as fuel for fire!
- God described those who live their life without Him as chaff—absolutely worthless! We live in a world of people who are building lives constructed of chaff!
- Application: Some of you are trying to build your life without Christ—you are building things that in God's eyes are as worthless as chaff!
- You will find yourself at the end of your life looking back on the emptiness of your soul as all you have labored to build will blow away like chaff! Some of you are living empty lives right now—you are desperately trying to find satisfaction in activities that from an eternal perspective are nothing more than chaff!
- Note the words of Solomon: *And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was*

pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun? For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity!

- Solomon—wisest and richest man on earth sought for contentment with all of his resources! Did not deny himself any pleasure, sex, power, wealth, labor—but at the end of his life—the wisest man on earth closes the pages of his life by saying all is vanity! Solomon chose the wrong road and instead of contentment—like Lot he found only vanity and ruin!
- How refreshing is the Psalmist's words are to those who seek contentment God's way—whatsoever he doeth shall prosper!

Conclusion: We have noted the two roads presented in this passage: The road to rejoicing and the road to ruin. This psalm has painted some deep contrasts between those who walk these different roads:

- Godly: Happy many times over-----Wicked: NOT SO!
- Godly :Avoids evil-----Wicked revel in sin!
- Godly are guided by God's word---Wicked are driven by the wind
- Godly like a firm and fruitful tree--Wicked like worthless chaff
- Godly destiny is secure and prosperous--Wicked shall perish in ruin

NOTE: These are two distinct roads going in two different directions (to/away from God) and ending up in two different destinations—Supreme Happiness/prosperity and utter ruin!

- Remember Lot and Joseph? Lot chose to walk the second path (easier and more pleasing to the eye) and Joseph chose to walk the first path (harder and more demanding). How did they end? Lot started out rich and ended up ruined, disgraced, fathering the children of his own daughters, and living in a cave! Joseph ended up sitting on a throne, in riches, honor, and great glory!
- This psalm is saying this: Before you can enjoy the blessing of praise and follow the pattern of prayer—you must choose which path you will walk!
- Everyone starts off at the same place—Lot, Joseph, and Solomon all started off at the same point—each made a personal decision and each ended up at a different destination!
- Some of you are facing that crossroad this morning—Which path will you choose?
- Life is like a coin---you can spend it any way you want but you can only spend it once! The road you choose will determine your destiny! Choose the path to righteousness today!

Psalm 4
“Looking Up When Your World Falls Apart”

Introduction:

- There are times in life that can only be described as “shattering”
- These experiences come unbidden, unwanted, and often unexpected.
- Such experiences often produce extreme depression and despair in the heart of the individual going through them.
- Such an experience came into the lives of the members of a small community in Texas named Killeen.
- On October 16, 1992 their world was shattered as a pickup truck driven by George Hennard rammed through a large plate glass window at Luby’s Cafeteria during the lunch hour rush.
- 15 minutes and 96 bullets later, 23 individuals were dead and 20 others injured.
- Erika Boylan and her sister Suzanna were two of the individuals whose lives were shattered by the tragedy. Their parents, Al and Ursula, were having lunch that day. Al was one of the first victims shot—Suzanna watched her mother gunned down in cold blood as she cradled the head of her dying husband.
- Erika has decided to handle her grief through an interview on national television which airs this weekend on “America’s Most Wanted”—“For us this is healing, to show other people you can survive.”
- Suzanna handles her grief through monthly meetings with other victims who rehash the events—“To find out that I’m not the only one who feels guilt and anger helps me to feel better.”

- Not everyone responds in this fashion when the world they live in falls apart.
- Some turn to drink or drugs
- Some respond by going out and running up their credit cards
- Some turn and just walk out of their life—disappear
- Some become very bitter and angry
- Some abandon God
- Question before us this evening, is simply—“How does God expect us to respond when our world is shattered by devastating events?”
- He has not left us to wonder or guess—He has given us a pattern to follow in the fourth Psalm where we find David, one of His greatest servants, in the middle of a shattered and broken world.
- David—reigned as king—sweet Psalmist of God—Restored—things looked great.
- Absalom—rises up and revolts. David and a small band of men are forced to flee.
- Out in the wilderness with a band of discouraged men—David reveals God’s pattern—Lift up your voice and Talk to God!

I. We Must Pray for Ourselves—For Help: 1

- David in the midst of the prices of his broken world—hiding in the wilderness as an outcast with a small band of loyal men while Absalom living in the palace and eating from the table that was rightfully David’s—Publically defiling 10 of David’s wives—lifts up his voice and cries to God for help.
- In this cry there are three significant things that David does that serve as a pattern for us when we find ourselves in similar circumstances:

A. Remember God’s Permanent Character from age to age: Faithful

- *O God of my righteousness*
- This is not a reference to David’s Character but rather to God’s.
- The word “righteous” here can mean “faithful” or “dependable”
- Really could be translated—“MY RIGHTEOUS GOD”

- David looks at his circumstances and sees very little hope.
- His army is scattered, his food and supplies have been left behind in Jerusalem, his own son has mounted a rebellion against him and has swayed the popular support of the leaders and the people in the city away from David.
- The few men that have followed David are weary, discouraged, and discontent.
- From these shattered pieces of his life—David looks up and thinks about God—and he focuses in on God’s permanent character from age to age—Faithful and Dependable.
- When the walls of your life come crashing in upon you and you sit among the pieces—you can focus on one of two things—the broken ruin around you or the permanent character of God.
- The thing that you choose to focus upon will directly affect your response in worship to God.
- If you focus on the broken pieces of your world—you will become bitter against God. If you focus on God’s permanent Character—you will rise up and lean on God for strength.
- As David sat surrounded by the broken pieces of his world—He focused on God’s Faithfulness and this caused him to remember something else about God.

B. Remember God’s Past Activity in Distressing Circumstances: Deliverance

- *Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.*
- “Distress”—literally a tight place—a narrow place with nowhere to go.
- “Enlarged”—to make room for me—to open a place of escape.
- Almost 30 years earlier David had found himself in these same hills under very similar circumstances.
- He was a fugitive—hiding from King Saul and the entire Israelite army.
- Saul literally hunted him down like a wild animal and David was running out of places to hide.
- Just when it looked like Saul had David trapped in a tight place with literally no place to go—God intervened and gave David some “breathing” room. He caused the Amorites to attack Saul’s home town—just when it looked like there was no hope for David—Saul took the entire army over to his home village to fight against the enemy.
- David reflects on God’s permanent faithfulness and remembers how God has delivered him in the past.

C. Request God’s Present Attention in a time of Desperate Need: Help

1. He Recognizes God’s Nearness: Hear my prayer
 2. He Appeals to God’s Goodness and Love: Have mercy
 - Literally be gracious toward me—{Ps 25:16}
 3. He Demands an Answer from God: Answer me when I call
 - “Hear me—KJV” literally means “Give me an answer”
- David’s attention now shifts to the circumstances around him. We find his mind wandering back to Jerusalem and to those who have risen up against him.

II. We Must Pray for Our Enemies—For Conviction: 2-5

- These verses are addressed to “Sons of Men”
- In this passage this is a direct reference to Absalom and to those who have chosen to follow him in his rebellion. David looks at these rebels and in his prayer he desires to do three specific things:

A. Confront them with their Sin: 2

- *How long will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love vanity and seek after leasing? Selah.*
- The word “Selah” is a very interesting word in the Psalms. It is like an emphasized period—it means to stop—take a long hard look at what you have just read—and THINK ABOUT IT VERY CAREFULLY.
- David addresses his enemies in verse two and then he tells them to stop and think about what they are doing.
- What exactly are they doing? What exactly does David want them to think about? What are we to pray that our enemies and our oppressors will see?
- When we pray for our enemies—we often pray that God will “get them” or “remove them”—When David prayed he wanted God to help them see two things.
 1. Their activity was causing God to be dishonored.
 - The phrase “my Glory” is translated “my honor” by the NASV.
 - Although this is possible—I think that David is not referring to his honor when he talks about his glory being reproached. Well—what is he talking about?
 - My Glory occurs one other time in Psalm 3:3 where David refers to God and calls God—“My Glory”
 - What David wants these Jewish rebels to realize was that by their rebellion, they had not just reproached their physical king—They had caused the name of God to be reproached by the pagans.
 2. Their real motives were not righteous.
 - David cuts through the surface issues—{well, we felt that we get more justice from Absalom...David is getting old...time for a change...etc.)—and confronts these people with the real issue at hand.
 - “Why are you loving vanity—or what is worthless?”
 - “Why are you seeking after leasing—or pursuing what you know is a deceptive lie?”
 - These are not innocent people who were caught up in a movement—these were individuals who had mounted a carefully prepared rebellion against Him.

B. Caution them with Divine Truth: 3-4

- David causes them to stop and think over what he has just said—and then he goes on to caution them with 2 divine truths:
 1. God will defend his children:
 - God has set apart the godly man for himself.
 - Set apart—means to mark off—to set aside for personal use.
 - Illustration—when we were children—Dad used to make cakes—we would watch Mom cut the cake and then we would “set apart” or “mark out” our piece and woe be to those who invaded our property.
 2. God knows their real motive: {5}

- Stand in awe and sin not—literally—“be angry and sin not”
- David is saying—if I have really offended you—if I have really wronged you and you have just reason to be angry with me and treat me in this fashion—then go ahead and be angry. BUT—when you are angry—don’t let your anger drive you to sinful actions.
- Commune in your own heart upon your bed—means to think about your real motives—do you really have a reason to be angry with me?
- **BE STILL**—Stop your activity against me!
- **POINT:** David was so confident in his integrity and his testimony that he could speak this way to his enemies. Now—remember, he is praying and asking God to do these things.
- **HEY**—if they really have reason to be angry with me—if I have really faulted them, then let them be angry—just keep them from sinful activity.
- **WOW!** So many times when our world falls apart—it is in part our fault. We lose our job—our employer releases us—well—why did he do it? if the truth be told, and you in your heart know the truth—he probably was justified in part.

C. Call them to Repentance: 5

- Even more important than the personal sin they were committing against David was the sin they were committing against God.
- They were going to the Temple and sacrificing and “worshipping” God as if nothing was wrong.
- David is more concerned with the sin against God than he is for himself.
- Not one time here does he ask God for his kingdom, or an army, or a plague to fall on his enemies.
- He looks at his enemies—those he loves—and he calls them to true repentance.
- Stop doing religious things—stop doing all the right things with your hands and start living the right things in your heart.
- What about you? Are you more concerned about the sin that has been done against you by your boss, your family, etc.? Or are you really concerned about their relationship to God?
- One of the reasons that some of us cannot call others to true worship—is because we are guilty of the same sin—we do with our hands but not with our hearts.

III. We Must Pray for those around us—For Encouragement: 6-8

- David ends this prayer by focusing his attention on the weary, discouraged band of men that have gathered around him.
- “There are many that say, “Who shall show us any good?”
- This was the cry of a discouraged group—we are in a hopeless situation—we have no food, no arms, no army, no homes, no family, and no hope for reinforcements.
- **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? HOW WILL WE EVER GET OUT OF THIS?**
- That is exactly how some of you feel this evening—your family situation, economic situation, physical situation—HOW WILL I EVER GET OUT OF THIS.
- Here is David’s prayer {and mine as your pastor} for those of you in these kinds of circumstances.

A. Prayer for God’s Presence: 6

- Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us.
- Let your face shine upon us!
- Lord—help us to realize that You are present with us in this trial.
- David wanted his men to realize that in the middle of their shattered world—stood the very God who had created the Universe!
- He who had spoken a universe into being could bring order to their world.
- Well, preacher, all you ever seem to do is “pray for us”—why don’t you get out and give us some real help? Why don’t you get some of that money you pick up on Sunday and help us get through this tight spot?
- Notice David’s response:

B. Praise for God’s Provision: 7

- They had no provision—they were starving.
- Absalom and his army of rebels were eating the grain and drinking the wine that was rightfully theirs.
- David—in spite all of this—right now—here in the middle of nowhere—with nothing to eat and nothing to drink—I have more gladness in my heart than they do.
- SOURCE—“Thou—God” When David is in need—he turns to God and not man for help.
- SEASON—Now—“hast” Right now—David states—I have this joy
- EXCELLENCE—“More than”...

C. Peace in God’s Protection: 8

- Well, David, How are we ever going to stand against such incredible odds?
- David does not sit down and consult with his generals—He consults with his God and then he states—When it comes time to lay down and sleep in just a while, I will sleep in peace—with no fear or worries—Why? BECAUSE GOD—YOU ARE THE ONE WHO WILL KEEP ME SAFE.
- This is the ultimate truth in the Christian life—all of our planning and all of our attempts are worthless if God is not on our side.
- David could weather the storm of a shattered world—because he was under God’s divine protection.
- What about you? Is this storm in your life something that you can sleep through because you know that God is on your side and will protect you?
- OR—have you sinned and rebelled against your God so that He is the one fighting against you?
- What a contrast—David sleeping in the wilderness peacefully as God guards his camp and Absalom posting a guard in the palace because he has been warned that David and his band will turn on them like a mother bear robbed of her cubs.
- Well—preacher—what do I do in my particular circumstance?

Are you weary are you heavy laden? TELL IT TO Jesus
 Are you grieving or joys departed? “ “
 Do the tears flow down your cheeks unbidden?
 Have you sins that from men’s eyes are hidden?
 Do you fear the gathering clouds of sorrow?
 Are you anxious what shall be tomorrow?
 Are you troubled at the thought of dying?

For Christ's coming kingdom are you sighing? TELL IT TO JESUS ALONE!

PURSuing THE PRESENCE OF GOD

THEME: Requirements for true worship
TEXT: Psalm 15
PROPOSITION: The key requirement for worship is holiness!
INTRO:

- Psalm written by David when he moved the ark of the covenant from the house of Obed-edom the tabernacle which he had erected in Jerusalem! (I Chron. 15:1; 15:25-28; 17:1-3, 36).
 - Time of great joy – national revival
 - Ark had remained in house of Obed-edom relatively forgotten by the people
 - Ark was finally coming home
 - Renewed interest in tabernacle
 - Entire nation gathered to worship
 - Thousands at the tabernacle
 - Altar ran with the blood of the sacrifices
- As David saw the people worship and offer sacrifices – he knew that some were sincere and others were merely caught up with the thrill of the moment.
- Perhaps as he brought the ark into the tabernacle and watched as it was set in the holy of holies the empty longing – the deep desire of his heart – remained unsatisfied! Going back to his palace in the quiet of the evening the sweet psalmist of Israel penned the words to the 15th Psalm revealing the desperate desire of his heart – to discover the secret to true worship!

I. The Request: V1 - . . . Lord, Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

A. Abide in your tabernacle:

- Abide – sojourn, visit, abide for a time
- Tabernacle – tent/house. In this case the tabernacle was God's tent/house. The place where God was.
- Lord, who can visit or abide in your house? Your dwelling place? Who is worthy to worship?

B. Dwell in your holy hill?

- This repeats the question in a slightly different manner. It is asking the same question but with a little different emphasis.
- **Dwell** – to inhabit, to occupy – very often used of long, permanent stays. Often used to describe God dwelling or inhabiting a location or place. It can sometimes indicate a closeness, or nearness of the person doing the dwelling.
- **Holy hill** – (mountain of your holiness) – could be the city where the tabernacle was to be set up = Jerusalem. Could be the promised Kingdom – who will live in the Kingdom you have promised to set up? Could be a reference to Heaven. Point is – the abode of God. The place where God is present!
- Not just who can visit your house – but who can dwell in nearness and fellowship – **who is worthy enough to permanently dwell in your presence?** (When someone dwelt in the tent of another – it implied favor, provision, and protection!)
- David is asking – What does a man have to do to dwell where you dwell? To permanently be a favored guest in the place where you dwell – be it the temple, kingdom, or heaven! **What do I have to do to pursue your presence?**

II. The Response: V 1-5 (11 requirements – Holiness!)

3 are positive (things we are to do) and internal

8 negative (things we are not to do) and external

Requirements that deal with the Character (what a man is) and Conduct (what a man does) of the man that would pursue the presence of God!

11 Requirements that reveal **holy character** and **holy conduct**!

A. Requirements of a Character: V2 (character must be Holy)

David records three overall requirements that must be true about the character of the man who would pursue the presence of God!

- These requirements deal with his relationship to God
- They deal with his character (what he is versus what he does)
- They are positive – things he must do
- They are internal
- If you desire a holy character, these three things must be true!

1. His walk must be perfect:

- **Walk** – way of life, to order one's conduct
- **Upright** (perfect) – complete, whole, lacking nothing, sound. This word is often used in similar contexts to describe moral completeness. **His way of life is not deficient in God's sight.**

2. His works must be righteous:

- **Work** – not normal word for work – it is a word that is often used to describe the moral actions of a man (the man doing wickedness).
- **Righteousness** – measuring up to the standard – just! (righteous scales)
- His moral actions are measuring up to God's standard! **His moral actions are approved by God!**

3. His words must be reliable – true

- **True** – not just accurate – reliable, dependable (a dependable bridge versus an unreliable bridge)
- **In his heart** – inner man. This is the source of all that proceeds from a man's mouth. God is not so much interested in what you say to him with your mouth. He is interested in what you say to him with your heart – your inner man.
- **His inner thoughts and words are reliable and dependable before God!**

These character traits are **permanent traits** – (participles) – traits that are constantly a part of his life – things that are permanent and not something that is done just when the preacher is around!

The man who would pursue the presence of God must be perfect, complete – dependable in every are of his character. His walk, his works, and his words, must meet the standard of God's approval.

B. Requirements of Conduct: V3-5 (conduct must be holy)

Not only does this psalm list the requirements of character but also the requirements of conduct.

- These are negative (what we are not to do) and positive (what we are to do).
- These are external – they can only be done effectively if the character is right.

1. **Right in his relationships** – to men!
 - a. **Backbiteth not** – from a word that means to “spy out!,” this is a reference to the man that is constantly looking for the faults and wrongs of others and is active in spreading them about! God said that the man who desired to pursue God’s presence will be a man who does not spy out and spread about the faults of others.
 - b. **doeth no evil** – does not purposefully engage in practices with the intent of hurting or inconveniencing other (he is not vengeful).
 - c. **does not take up a reproach** – Lit – does not life up – he does not readily accept something bad about another – constantly giving the benefit of the doubt. Eager to believe the good – slow to believe the bad! This is contrary to our nature – we are quick to judge – quick to accept an evil report – almost happy to hear something bad about another – The man who desires to be a permanent guest in god’s house does not do this!
2. **Right in his associations/attitudes toward men**
 - a. **he despises** – rejects, looks away from those who habitually live in defiance to the Lord. He does not admire their lifestyle – he does not seek their favor – he does not fear to confront with truth! (this is what we need to do – yet we often fear them and sometimes even admire them.)
 - b. **he honors** those that fear the Lord!
Honor – to make great – to hold in high esteem! His heroes are those that fear the Lord! Who are your heroes? Well preacher – of course my heroes are men that fear the Lord! What is a hero? A hero is someone that you want **more than anything else** to be like! In your daydreams – you desire to be like your hero! Who are your heroes? Who do you daydream about?
3. **Right in his dealings with men**
 - a. **he is reliable** at all costs! His Word is Good! When he makes a promise and then discovers that it will disadvantage him to keep that promise – He keeps the promise! You are only as good as your word! When you say something, do it, even if it means being disadvantaged!
 - b. **He is not oppressive**: usury refers to the practice of those who would lend out their money to folks who were in misfortune at an interest rate that was unfair. It referred to those that took advantage of the misfortune of their brother in order to gain profit for themselves. The Lord allowed His people to lend out money and charge interest to other nations, but He would not allow that practice to go on among the people themselves! Why? Principle – not wrong to make investments that are fair and honest. It is wrong to take advantage of your brother’s misfortune for personal gain!
 - c. **He is unrepachable** – he will not accept anything that will color his judgment or dealing with another! He is fair!

III. The Result: V5c ...He that doeth these things shall never be moved!

- This is the man who can permanently abide in the presence of God!
- The man who has right (holy) character – walk, works, words that meet God’s standard!
- The man who has right (holy) conduct to others – his relationships, his associations/attitudes, and his dealings with men reflect holiness before God!
- This man can permanently abide in the presence of God as his friend!

CONCLUSION

Two responses of the worshippers:

- Some worshippers (unsaved) would say – it is **impossible to keep** these requirements – all of my sacrifices, all of my good intentions are worthless – NO ONE can ever be this holy! EXACTLY! That is the point – no one can ever hope to dwell with God because no one is holy enough to do so! **BUT** God made it possible for us to overcome his terrible truth! Jesus Christ is the only one who can make me holy enough to dwell with God! I can't dwell with God alone – but through the blood of Jesus Christ I can dwell with God.
- Other worshippers (Christians) say – I've already trusted Christ – therefore, it doesn't matter what I do – I don't need to pursue the presence of God – I automatically have it. This psalm tells the Christian that God has established certain requirements concerning the character and conduct of those who dwell with him! If you want to enjoy God's presence, then you must conform to God's requirements.

Are you pursuing the presence of God?

The Bible: A Priceless Treasure

Text: Ps. 19:7-11

Intro:

Man has always tried to understand God!

-Lives in a box—always trying to chisel his way out to see the supernatural!

-Man could not get up to God—God had to come down to reveal Himself to man!

-Greatest privilege we have is that God loved us enough to take interest in revealing himself to us!

-David really appreciated this fact and wrote a Psalm to be sung in Israel's worship service! A Psalm to the song director! The theme of this song—God has revealed Himself to us!

I. God's Revelation through the Skies: Nature (1-6)

- Note 4 things about God's revelation through nature:

A. Manner of Revelation: Silence of Nature

- Heavens are declaring—manifesting the glory of God
- Their expanse is showing the work of His hands!
- The Lord revealed His message to lost mankind through nature itself!
- Every star in the universe exists to declare the Glory of God!
- Every morning the Sun arises in all of its glory to paint the world in the bright and glorious colors of life—all the while declaring that there is a God who make all that our eyes behold!
- This revelation is not a revelation of speech or sound! Not wrapped in the garments of human language—It is written in a universal language that all can understand! The silence of nature declares that God exists!

B. Contents of Revelation: Glory of God!

- Reveal God's presence: there has to be a creator!
- Reveal His power.

C. Object/extent of Revelation: (vs. 4)

- To all men everywhere!
- All men see the sun! Almost every nation has a tradition somewhere in its history of worshiping the sun or some aspect of nature! They know that there is a creator and they know that He is powerful!

D. Purpose of Revelation: Accountability! (Romans 1)

- There is a God!
- He is powerful and He owns all that exists!
- You are accountable to that God! You need to please Him!
- Men down through the centuries have tried to please the God they did not know! Paul tells us of the Athenians who had an altar to the "unknown God"---that God was revealed in Nature!

But this revelation was not sufficient---all it could do was let men know that God existed and that they were accountable to Him but nature could not tell them how they could please this God:

- As great as Nature is—there is an even greater means of revelation! The Bible!
- The vast heavenly bodies orbiting with flawless precision in the skies are a clear manifestation of the infinite wisdom and power of the creator! NEVERTHELESS—the celestial panorama is not the ultimate form of divine revelation! It is the study of God's will as revealed in the scriptures which presents the clearest available perception of the creator!

II. God's Revelation through the Scriptures: Biblical (7-11)

A. A manner of Revelation: Bible

B. Contents of Revelation:

- More than just the presence and power of the creator!
- NOTE! In vs. 1-6 the name that is used for God is God—the mighty One! This name points out His power and might!
- NOTE! In vs. 7-ff the name used for God is Lord—Jehovah! This is God's special/personal name given to His chosen people!
- Scriptures reveal more than just God's presence and His power—they reveal His personality! They tell us what God is like!

C. Object of Revelation:

- His chosen people! Name Jehovah was given to His special people who had a relationship with Him!

D. Purpose of Revelation: Fellowship!

- Bible is a priceless possession—it does what the forces of nature could not do!
- It brings a man into a right relationship with God---fellowship!
- How? By providing a spiritual remedy for His spiritual weaknesses!
- Note this treasure—the Bible is described in great detail!
- It is a treasure because it provides the answer to man's sin problem—and gives a remedy for spiritual weakness!
- 6 titles
- 6 descriptions
- 6 effects or results!

1. Weans a man from evil: 7

The law of the Lord is perfect restoring the soul!

- Law of the Lord: Instruction or teaching (all of the bible)
- Perfect: whole, complete,
I Sam. 14:41 give a perfect (complete) portion or lot...
Job 36:4 god is perfect in knowledge (complete)
- Converting the soul: converting: turning or restoring—a reversal or direction! Soul—entire man!

Application: God's instruction or teaching is complete and it is sufficient to turn a man's entire life around when he submits to that teaching! That is what some of you need this morning! Submit to God's complete instruction! Turn and be revitalized.

2. Delivers a man from spiritual naivety: 7

The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple!

- Testimony: Reminders or signs given by God! Declarations about Himself.
- Sure: trustworthy—dependable! SECURE!
- Making wise the simple:
 - Simple: gullible, ignorant, naïve, immature
 - Wise: skillful, discerning, prudent

Application: It helps a man see things as they really are spiritually and make right choices on the basis of that perception!

- Some of you are spiritually naïve—gullible!
- You constantly find yourself making choices that lead you in spiritual messes! How can you remedy that? The declarations that God has made about Himself will make you wise and skillful in your Christian walk!

Illust: God has made a declaration about Himself: He will punish sin! When you understand this declaration—it will make you wise in your decisions about what you allow into your life!

3. **Leads to spiritual contentment: 8**

The precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart!

- Precepts: Responsibilities that God places upon man!
- Right: straight—correct! Upright! Clear!
- Rejoiceth the heart:
 - Heart: inner man
 - Rejoiceth: not laughter---but contentment—and satisfaction in spite of circumstances!
- The responsibilities that God lays upon you are right and good! They are clearly delineated for you in scripture and they will bring true satisfaction to your inner soul!
- The reason some of you live in turmoil is because you refuse to live up to the responsibilities God has placed upon you!
 - Keep pure
 - Read the Bible
 - Keep Sabbath day for God!
 - When you refuse to meet these responsibilities you forfeit the right to contentment! Paul says Godly contentment is great gain!
 - You are miserable and try to find happiness outside of God's design and it will only lead to further misery!

4. **Directs into God's will: 8**

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes!

- Commandment: Divine imperatives! Unbendable, unbreakable, Unchangeable, Unchallenged LAWS handed down by a supreme authority!
(10 commandments—not suggestions! Must be obeyed without question or exception! ALL THE TIME!)
- Pure: idea here is that of radiance—brightness! Clear or clean!
Used in the verse: Where there is not ox the crib is clean!
 - There is not defilement or uncleanness in God's divine demands!
- They enlighten the eyes:
 - Enlighten: to give understanding—to illuminate
 - Eyes: refers to our intellect or to our understanding.
- God's divine demands—unchangeable, unbendable laws for living will shine and illuminate our understanding in the way that God desires for us to live!

5. **Stabilizes our relationship with God: 9**

The fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever.

- Fear: awe—reverence! A wholesome respect for who God is!
- Clean: purifying! Medical word work used for catheterization!
- Enduring forever! It is permanent in its results!
- When you have a reverential awe for who God is—the effect will be a purging of the things that displease Him—permanently!

- When you really understand what God is like—and that He lives with you all the time—then some of the things you allow into your life would go out for good! (movies, smoking, thoughts, speech, etc.)
- Illust of cop driving beside you!
- Fear of the Lord means living as if God were watching everything you do—and He does!

6. Builds our faith in God's actions: 9

The judgments of the Lord are true they are righteous altogether!

- Judgments: Judicial term—decisions—ore sentences! Here is refers to the actions and decisions of the Lord that have been revealed in the Bible!
- True: certain, dependable, right, enduring!
- Righteous: conformed to a standard! They measure up to god's nature! Nothing that God has done—or decided is contrary to His nature: justice and holiness!
- You may not think so and it may not appear to be fair—but from God's perspective—it is just and right!
- Illust: 2 boys from Christian homes died of cancer!
 - One family bitter because of a weakness in the Work!
 - The other family turned tragedy into triumph because they had seen God's faithfulness and the rightness of His action in the Bible!
 - Do you think that Mary questioned God when she was pregnant out of wedlock? What about Joseph? Do you think Paul questioned God when unjustly treated? I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content! That is what some of you need!
 - Your faith in your God is weak because you have not see His righteousness in the Word!

III. Man's Response the Scriptures: Application:

A. Realize that it is our greatest Possession:

- Better than gold than much fine Gold!
- Gold in David's time was the measure of a man's wealth!
- Refined gold was best there was!
- Psalmist is saying: If you had refined gold—it would be worth a fortune—a great treasure! But an even greater treasure is the word of God!
- Some of you say O How precious it is—but you never read it!
- Oh—how I love it! But you never obey it!
- It is a treasure---buried beneath the dust of a bookshelf forgotten until Sunday or Wednesday!

B. Regard it as our highest Pleasure:

Sweeter than Honey in the honeycomb:

- Nothing sweeter or more pleasant in the OT world!
- As sweet as honey is—the bible is sweeter still!
- For some of you it is a bitter pill that prods and pokes you all the way down!

C. Respond to it as our strongest Protection:

- By them your servant is warned!
- Bible is our protection by warning us of sin and its consequences!
- The laws and precepts set down in its pages were not made for god's benefit—they were made for yours!
- Illust: Bible says don't marry unbelievers! Not for God's benefit—for your protection!
- Bible says protect your body's and don't misuse them—smoking etc. not for god's benefit for yours!

D. Receive from it our greatest Profit:

- In keeping them there is great reward!
- God promises eternal reward and present reward for those who live by God's Word!

A SHEPHERD'S LOOK AT PSALM 23

I shall not want . . .

Story told of an ancient pilgrim that had been commissioned by God to go up and down the world singing a strange melody that, when heard by an individual, caused that individual to forget whatever sorrow he had or was enduring.

How many times have we longed for such a pilgrim to sing such a melody to our ears in our times of grief and sorrow. How many times as we endured the sorrow of loss, or watched a loved one in the anguish of an illness, have we longed for the sweet bliss of forgetfulness? What widow has longed for such a melody to ease her grief? What orphan has longed for those pleasant notes to fall upon a broken heart.

Such a pilgrim indeed did exist – the sweet psalmist of Israel – David. Indeed he was commissioned by the Sovereign God of Heaven to sign such a melody that has the power to cause a man to forget his sorrow – the words to this familiar melody have been preserved for us in the 23rd Psalm.

David, the Shepherd-King of Israel, motivated perhaps by his boyhood memories of keeping his father's sheep – compares himself to a sheep under the care of a shepherd and makes an astounding statement – I Shall Not Want!

I. The Role of the Shepherd:

- Shepherd was the owner
 - Shepherd was the manager
 - Shepherd was the provider and protector
-
- David presents here a solemn truth – in life, we are all sheep that belong to a shepherd.
 - Some shepherds were good – provided for sheep, green lush pastures
 - Some shepherds were bad – mistreated, starved, and abused their sheep.
 - Illustration – A shepherd's look at Psalm 23 – Phillip Keller – shepherd in Africa – neighbor was bad shepherd who did not have green pastures – his sheep were sickly and abused – they would come to the fence that separated the dry pastures of their master from Keller's lush fields and his heart would go out to them as they looked longingly at the green grass.

II. The Identity of the Shepherd:

- David's point – I am a sheep, and I have a shepherd – my shepherd is the Lord!
 - Many people know that the Lord is a shepherd – but is he their shepherd.
 - They are like the sheep of that bad shepherd whose pastures were barren.
-
- What qualifications does God have to be my shepherd – master, owner, manager?
 - Look at the vastness of heaven, the complexities of the universe, the miracle of creation and how it all works in perfect design.
 - David's point – the Lord who created all this, who sustains all this, who knows what is best for every single element of creation – He is my Shepherd!

III. The Conclusion of the Sheep:

- Because of who my shepherd is – the Lord – I shall not want.
 - "Want" – to lack or to need.
 - David was confident as a sheep that belonged to God – that God knew exactly what was best for David.
-
- Sometimes sheep need things that they don't necessarily want or like.

- They need to be sheared – often a painful experience.
 - Sometimes they need a special diet that does not taste good to rid them of disease.
 - Sometimes they need discipline.
 - Sometimes they need to be kept away from food and water to reduce their body fluids.
 - Sometimes they need to be sent out to graze in lush pastures.
- ❖ Point: A good shepherd knows exactly what his sheep need at a given point in time and will make sure that his sheep get exactly what they need – they will not want.
 - ❖ Application: God knows exactly what I need at any given time!
 - I may need to be sheared.
 - I may need a special diet.
 - I may need discipline.
 - I may need to be sent out to graze in lush pastures.
 - ❖ Whatever I need – God knows, and He will make sure I get it!

CONCLUSION:

There are two shepherds in life – God and Satan

You are a sheep, and you are under the care of one shepherd or the other.
 Maybe you are a sheep that is longing for the care and provision that David talked about.

Maybe you have been abused and neglected in the barren pastures of sin.

Come to know the tender provision and the loving care of the Good Shepherd.

Psalm 26

Introduction:

One of the most difficult situations that we face is the burden of mistreatment.
All of us have been mistreated:

- Enemies
- Friends
- Employers
- Church/Pastor
- Husband/wife
- God

Two normal responses:

- Get even!
- Harbor Resentment/Bitterness

These two responses will destroy your life. Psalms 26 is God's pattern for dealing with mistreatment. David had been grossly mistreated, possibly by Saul. Instead of getting even or getting bitter he followed God's plan, and he recorded its steps for us.

Four Steps to Overcoming Mistreatment

- I. Be open before the Lord (vs. 1-2)
 - David's cry is the same as ours – "vindicate me"
 - "Prove my inner being to the entire world" How?

Three Different things David is asking God to Do:

- A. Examine my life:
 - Examine – to prove; scrutinize; to place under a microscope
- B. Try me out:
 - Try – to test; to put under trial; an intensive test
 - Examples: Coach trying out a basketball player – intensive; test to almost breaking point; new car
 - *Reveal my weakness!
- C. Test me:
 - Test – word used of refining precious metals
 - David is saying "refine me" "purify me"

Here is the point: When you are mistreated, ask God to

1. Make an internal search of your life
2. Reveal through testing the condition of your heart
3. Refine and purify your heart

- II. Remember His Love and Faithfulness and continue to obey His Word (vs. 3)

- Remember past power
- Remember present promises
- Keep obeying His Word!

III. Maintain your spiritual testimony

A. Refuse to get even! (vs. 4-5)

B. Protect your purity (vs. 6a)

Don't hate or become bitter

Don't harbor a grudge

C. Be faithful in Prayer and Praise (vs. 6b)

Pray!

Praise the Lord in your heart and publicly! (vs. 7-8)

IV. Determine to wait for the Lord's Deliverance! (vs. 11-12)

Personal decision regardless of circumstances... "as for me" (vs. 11)

Personal faith in God's promise – Redeem me and be gracious!

Spiritual Illusions (When Promises become Problems)

Text: Ps 37:1-11

Introduction:

- **Optical Illusion:** A visual image that is deceptive or misleading!
- Optical illusions are specifically designed to fool or mislead the viewer.
- Magician: Performing—secret to most of his tricks is to create an optical illusion that will mislead your attention away from what is really going on!
- MGM studios: drove us on a tour of the backstage sets used to create illusions of reality on the screen.
 - Took us to a huge pool with a scale model of a warship—used wind machines and rain machines to create a storm—Filmed it and showed us what it looked like on screen.
 - Took us backstage—Beth—on Lucille Ball show—looked real!
 - Took us for a drive and saw beautiful homes—but they were just optical illusions designed to mislead the viewer—no backs—just fronts!
- Optical illusions are images or perceptions that are created and designed with the specific purpose of deceiving or misleading the viewer!
- **Satan has created some Spiritual illusions that are designed to deceive and mislead the believer!**
- God has given every believer some tremendous promises in His word!
 - **Romans 8:28** *All things work together for good to them that love God.*
 - **Phil 4:19** *And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory!*
 - **Mark 11:24** *Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be yours!*
- Here is the illusion that Satan sets up: These promises don't really work!
 - God said that all things work together for good—but the wicked are the ones that seem to prosper while the righteous are afflicted!
(Why is it that the godly Christian who never smoked a day in his life is the one afflicted with cancer and the wicked go untouched?)
 - God said He would supply all our needs—why are the wicked so prosperous and the believer so needy?
(Look at reality—usually wicked are the rich and Christians are poor)
- My theology says one thing—and my experience says another thing!
- How am I as a Christian supposed to respond when I see this contradiction?
- How do I avoid being misled by Satan's spiritual illusion?
- How do I make what I believe match up with what I am experiencing?

I. God's Reminder: 37:1 (Proverbs 24)

Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers.

- God knew that we would respond to Satan's illusion in 1 of 3 ways so He specifically deals with each one of them.

A. Do not Fret: 37:1 (Proverbs 24:19)

- **Fret:** To become hot—irritated—agitated—frustrated—ANGRY!
- Illust: Some very interesting example of this word in Scripture:
 - Balaam—called by King Balack, the enemy of God's people to put a curse on the Israelites. (Tried everything else—only way to curse)
 - * Balaam prayed and God said no—King offered money—Balaam kept pestering God and finally he persuaded himself that God had finally given permission to go!
 - * On the way—already convicted in his heart—a bit fearful—trying to persuade himself that it really was God's will (like some of you)—all of a sudden the donkey stops—goes off into the field—Balaam gets **irritated** and whacks it with his staff!
 - * A little bit later the donkey sees the angle again and swerves into the wall and crushes Balaam's foot! Now he has progressed beyond irritation—He is agitated and frustrated—whacks it again—harder!
 - * Third time—Donkey falls to the ground and throws Balaam!
 - * At this point Balaam has developed our word to the fullness of its meaning—He is mad—red-hot angry! He loses his temper!
 - * Balaam kicks it—coaxes it—curses it—finally gets so frustrated that he beats it 3x with his staff and the donkey sits up and speaks to him—Hey! Why are you beating me 3 times? Balaam is too angry and frustrated that he doesn't stop to think that the donkey has just spoken to him—he retorts—I am beating you because you are mocking me by refusing to go on—you're just lucky this staff isn't a sword because if it were I would kill you!
- God is saying—When you see the wicked prosper—and you will—you need to watch out! Satan has created an illusion designed to mislead you!
- Don't let their apparent prosperity cause you to become irritated and frustrated—and then downright angry!
- Don't get hot about the prosperity of the wicked—it will lead you to wrong actions!

B. Do not Envy: 37:1

- Envy—to become jealous—to want what they have!
- They can live as they please and nothing seems to happen!
- God says—don't envy wrongdoers!
- Satan makes a life of sin so attractive! It is an illusion designed to mislead the believer and make him want that same kind of "freedom"
- Some of you here are envious of the lifestyle of the unsaved.
- They do certain things and don't get caught—nothing happens to them—drink, cheat on their wives, watch filthy movies, cheat on their taxes, hedge on their time card—and they make it seem so attractive!
- God says—don't desire or envy that kind of a lifestyle!

C. Do not Participate: Prov 24:1

Do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them!

- A third response that Christians often have to Satan's illusion is a desire to participate in that which seems too good and exciting!

- If you get angry about the injustice of the situation that appears to be happening before you—then it won't be long until you are envious.
- When you start to envy the lifestyle of the wicked—it won't be long until you desire to be with them and participate in their practices!
- God says—STOP! DON'T GET ANGRY—DON'T GET ENVOIOUS—AND WHATEVER YOU DO—DON'T PARTICIPATE IN THEIR PRACTICE! DON'T EVEN DESIRE TO BE WITH THEM! STAY AWAY!!

Trans: Why shouldn't I get angry, envious, or become a participant?

II. God's Reasons: 37:2

For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb.

- God answers by delineating three sobering reasons why you and I should not get caught up in Satan's illusion by becoming angry, envious, or participants in the apparent prosperity of the wicked.

A. Their Practice is Wicked: Prov 24:2

For their heart studieth destruction and their lips talk of mischief.

- Heart—entire inner man
- Studieth—to devise, think up, scheme
- Destruction—violence
- Mischief—trouble
- Another translation: *For their minds devise00think up—scheme—violence and their lips talk of trouble!*

B. Their Future is Bleak: Prov 24:19-20

Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out!

- *For there will be no future for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked shall be put out!*
- There is absolutely no future ahead for them—Don't envy this!

C. Their End is Destruction: Prov 24:20

The lamp of the wicked shall be put out!

- *Psalm 37 puts it this way (vs 9-10) For evildoers will be cut off, But those that wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there. (Vs 35-40)*

Trans: Well what can I do to sustain myself through this illusion?

III. God's Requirements and Rewards: 37:3-11

- God reminds the godly man that the apparent prosperity of the wicked is nothing more than an illusion created by Satan to mislead the Christian and take him away from the place of God's blessing!
- God exposes the emptiness of Satan's illusion by reminding the believer of three great spiritual truths or rewards and the requirements for obtaining them!
- Here is how you are to respond when you see the apparent prosperity of the wicked! (If you are not enjoying these benefits—then maybe you are not meeting the requirements)

A. Remember that God Satisfies the Godly: 37:3-4

Trust in the Lord and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.

1. **The Promise:** He will give you the desires of your heart!

2. **The Conditions:**

- *Trust in the Lord and do good:*

- Believe what God has said and act accordingly—please the Lord!
- Some of you become angry at the unfairness of your circumstance and you engage in a sinful attitudes or activities.
- **Dwell in the Land and cultivate faithfulness:**
 - Don't envy the situation and circumstance of the sinner
 - You continue to faithfully do what God has called you to do!
 - Cultivate—hard work—cultivate faithfulness to the Lord no matter what others seem to have!
- **Delight yourself in the Lord:**
 - Stop desiring and envying the pleasure of the wicked
 - Start making God the object of your desires!

B. Remember that God promises Security to the Godly: 37:5-6

Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. And He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday.

- **Commit:** literally to roll—roll your burdens your lot in life upon the Lord's shoulders instead of on your own.
- **Trust:** have confidence—believe what God has said!
 - God has promised to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory—roll your burdens on Him and believe!
 - God has promised to answer your prayers—roll then on God and believe!
- God has promised that if you will roll your burdens on Him and believe what He has said—THEN HE WILL DO IT!
- Preacher—I have rolled my burdens on the Lord and I have prayed-
 - But He hasn't come through! Problem: We roll our burdens on the Lord and then run around trying to figure out ways to solve them ourselves.
 - Illust: Young man trying to get in Med School. Asked me to help. I called registrar and the Dean of the School—they got busy. Meanwhile—he called the president of the school who called these men and got all over them! As a result—I was scolded!
 - We do that to God—instead of leaving our problems with God—when it gets down to the wire—we don't have faith—day before the bill is due—hours before the deadline for an event to occur we panic and take back the problem instead of leaving it with God! THIS REVEALS SOMETHING VERY SIGNIFICANT—WE REALLY DON'T BELIEVE THAT God IS GOING TO COME THROUGH!

C. Remember that God guarantees the Stability of the Godly: 37:7-11

Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it leads only to evil-doing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land.

Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there.

But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity!

1. **Promise:** righteous/humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. (stability)
2. **Conditions:**
 - **Rest** in the Lord: literally—to be still—to be quiet.
“Resignation—a quiet mind which rests on God, renouncing all self-help—and submits to the will of God!”
 - Wait patiently: calm, quiet patience that is content to let God be God!

- Many of us wait—but we are not still or quiet—we are frantically trying to do everything in our power to work out the situation to our advantage!
- Many of us wait—but our wait is certainly not patient!
- Little boy waiting for school to get out—frustrated—wiggly
- Husband waiting for his wife—sighs, groans, grumbles
- That is how many of us wait on God!

Conclusion:

- How do you make your theology fit your experience?
- How do you see through Satan's optical illusion?
- By refusing to get angry, envious, or becoming a participant!
- By trusting God and doing good!
- By cultivating faithful obedience to his life!
- By determining to roll your burdens upon His shoulders and patiently waiting for Him to solve them without your help!
- Why should we do this? Because God makes 2 specific promises!
 1. He will reward the righteous!
 2. He will judge the wicked!
- Illust: Remember I told you about MGM? Backstage tour—saw some houses that were absolutely gorgeous! Very expensive looking!
- When we turned and went down the next street we saw the backs of those fabulous homes—just frames—nothing more than an empty shell!
- That is exactly what some of you here are desiring!
- You desperately want what the wicked seem to enjoy—but when you finally get it you will find that it is nothing more than an illusion—an empty shell!
- Rich man showing his wealth to an old Scottish preacher—“What do you think about all of this wealth preacher?” Preacher remarked—“It sure makes it hard to die!”
- This is what he was saying—This is the only heaven that you will ever know—this is as good as it is ever going to get for you!
- For the believer—this world with all that it has to offer is the only hell that we will ever know!
- David puts it this way:

I have seen a violent, wicked man spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil.

Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found!

Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have a posterity.

But the transgressors will be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked will be cut off.

But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble.

And the Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him!
- Where are you taking refuge? In the Lord—or in the Illusion?

THE SHEEP OF HIS PASTURE

Text: Psalm 100:3 – *“Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.”*

Introduction:

- Probably the most familiar phrase in all of Scripture are the timeless words uttered from the mouth of David, the shepherd king of Israel, when he cried out in unbounded joy – “The Lord is my Shepherd!”
- While these words go on to introduce a great many benefits that are the believers, they contain an even more essential concept – the basis of all of the benefits that follow!
- These words tell us why we shall never want or lack what we need. These words tell us why we can expect the still waters and the green pastures. They explain why we can walk through the valley of death itself with no fear. They give us the reason behind the rod and the staff which are for our benefit and encouragement. They explain the goodness and the mercy that are now a part of our daily life. They give us the ground of assurance of our place at the table spread before the God of Heaven.
- All of these blessed benefits are ours because of what David reveals in the first five words of the Psalm – The Lord is my Shepherd! It is my relationship to God that guarantees us the blessings that follow.
- The Bible speaks often of my relationship to God. Theologically, I know that when I was “saved” or “redeemed” I entered into a personal relationship with God.
- To help me make my theology personal and practical – to make it clear and relevant to my daily life – God has described that relationship in the Bible through a series of “images” or pictures.
- We are going to look at one of these images or pictures this morning – the image described in Psalm 23:1, and verbalized in Psalm 100:3 – **as God’s children, we are just like sheep, and He is just like a shepherd.**
- **There are three key aspects of this image that will help us understand our role as sheep of His pasture.**

I. The Picture of God’s People: Sheep

Throughout the Bible, God uses the image of sheep to describe the people that belonged to Him and enjoyed a special relationship with Him.

A. Old Testament Israel seen as Sheep

- From its inception, the nation of Israel has been the special “flock” of God (Numbers 27:17).
- God is described as the shepherd of Israel (Psalm 80:1).
- David describes the nation as the sheep of God’s pasture (Psalm 100:3; 79:13; 95:7).
- When He led them out of Israel, “He led them like a flock by the hand of Moses” (Psalm 77:20).
- Jeremiah wept when he saw the “flock of God being led away” (Jeremiah 13:17).
- Under the wicked King Ahab, God’s prophet saw “all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep having no shepherd!” (I Kings 22:17).
- Isaiah looked at the wickedness and rebellion of God’s people and cried out in broken-hearted anguish – “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way!” (Isaiah 53:6).

- POINT: Over and over again God presents Himself as the Shepherd and His people as the sheep of His pasture.
- Sometimes they are responsive and submissive
- Sometimes they are wicked and rebellious
- Sometimes they are scattered and injured
- BUT – they are always, always, always HIS SHEEP AND HE IS THEIR SHEPHERD!
- KEY – the point that God is making here is this: As the sheep of His pasture, God’s people in the Old Testament enjoyed a very special relationship with Him that no other nation enjoyed!

B. New Testament Believers seen as Sheep:

- Old Testament Israel was pictured as the special sheep of God’s pasture – but in the New Testament, God comes to the lost sheep of Israel and they reject Him!
- We read in John’s account that He came unto His own and His own received Him not!
- We read that when He looked at the multitudes, He was moved to compassion because He saw them as sheep having no shepherd!
- He wept over the lost sheep of Jerusalem.
- The final act of rebellion was when the wicked undershepherds of Israel rose up and crucified the true shepherd!
- Now, God has chosen us to be His flock. The church is His “little flock” (Luke 12:32) made up of lost sheep that responded to His call and allowed Him to rescue them (Matthew 18:10-14). These sheep have entered into the door of the sheepfold and now go in and out under the sound of the shepherd’s voice (John 10).
- Now that we understand the clear picture that God presents in Scripture, we must try to understand the lessons that God has for us in this picture. Why does God compare us to sheep?

II. The Parallels presented:

- Phillip Keller, in his book *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23*, makes this observation: “It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways as will be seen in further chapters. Our mass mind or mob instincts, our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance!”
- There are many parallels in scripture between sheep and believers, but there are six key parallels that I would like for us to examine this morning that will help us understand why God calls us the “sheep of His pasture.”

A. Sheep are “clean” animals (Leviticus 11:1-8)

- Leviticus contains a long list of different types of animals that can be utilized for food or for use by the nation of Israel.
- Each animal basically fell into one of two categories: clean or unclean.
- This had really very little to do with the physical cleanliness of the animal because all animals were dirty to one extent or the other. Rather, this had to do with the acceptability of the animal for use or consumption.
- For example: A cow was considered a “clean or acceptable” animal for food whereas a dog or a serpent was considered as “unclean or unacceptable” for food.
- Sheep were classified as “clean” animals.
- It is interesting to note that the Bible divides up the human race into two groups – “clean and unclean or saved and unsaved.”
- This morning, you are either a sheep of God’s pasture cleansed by the blood of Christ, or you are lost and on your way to hell.

- In other words, there is a clear difference between you and the large majority of people on this earth!
- Just like the majority of the nations that surrounded Israel were lost – even so the majority of people on the earth have chosen to reject Christ!
- This morning, if you are saved, then you have been “cleansed” by Christ and are part of His flock.

B. Sheep are productive animals

- A second comparison made in scripture between sheep and the believer is the comparison of productivity or usefulness.
- Sheep not used for food in Biblical Times for the most part.
- Usually used for one of 3 things: Sacrifice to God, wool for clothing, milk for cheese and beverage. (Upon occasion a sheep would be slaughtered and eaten)
- Usually a shepherd was able to develop relationships with his sheep because the sheep did not have to die to be productive – their job was to produce wool and they did this on an ongoing basis.
- As God’s sheep, we are to be productive and useful to God! We are to be producing spiritual wool!
- Paul tells us that we were created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works!
- NOTE: Paul specifically tells us that we cannot do good works to get saved! God does not save us because He saw that we were doing good works! BUT – He saved and now that He saved us, He wants us to fulfill our purpose – to do good works!
- We are told to let our light shine before men so that they may see our “good works” and glorify our Father in Heaven!
- Problem – there are a great many sheep that are part of God’s pasture that really don’t look like sheep! They have wallowed in the mud pit of sin and they look more like pigs than sheep!
- II Timothy 2:19 *Let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity*

C. Sheep are safest in the flock.

- It is the nature of a sheep to want to herd together with the flock
- Used to have sheep in Texas – only two – but they had a natural desire to want to be together
- A lone sheep was in great danger – why? Because sheep have a great many natural enemies and very few defenses
- There are wolves and wild animals who love to feed on the tender meat of a well fed sheep
- There are serpents hiding in the grass that the sheep love to eat
- There are hidden holes which may break the frail leg of a sheep
- There are cliffs and ravines which may swallow up a sheep
- As long as sheep herd together around the shepherd, these dangers are virtually eliminated (Same thing with a believer – we need one another)

D. Sheep tend to stray

- When Isaiah looked for a way to describe the tendency of God’s people to rebel against God – the image that came to his mind was that of the tendency of a rebellious sheep to wander away from the shepherd and the safety of the path and

the flock. “All we like sheep have gone astray – we have turned every one to his own way – just like sheep!”

- We had two sheep that loved to go their own way
- Used to have them tethered on long ropes so that they could graze in “safe areas”
- We used to have a canal bank that had rich tall green grass for them to feed
- Would beat the grass with a long stick or palm branch so that any snakes or animals hiding in the grass would move on to other areas and the sheep would be safe
- One of these sheep would constantly try to get away and get into areas where she was not supposed to be. She constantly pulled at the end of her rope
- We would give her just enough rope so that she could eat grass that grew fairly high on the canal bank but not enough to eat at the very top so she would not fall into the canal itself
- She constantly pulled against the stake and finally loosened it just enough so that she could get to the very top of the bank. When she got to the top, she turned around and began to pull even harder. She apparently lost her balance and her back legs fell over the bank and into the canal and she ended up choking to death strangled by the very rope that was designed to keep her safe and happy
- God has taken time to put us in a safe place to feed. He has carefully warned us about the terrible dangers that wait for us outside the boundaries of His word. He has placed us on a long leash and has given us the richest and best grass upon which to feed – and yet many of us are just like sheep. We want to go our own way!
- We pull and pull until finally we break away from the rope and end up destroying our lives in the field of sin!
- Illustration: Uncle Larry – a man who knew the Scriptures – a man who was a youth pastor. Got away from the Lord – one of the vices he picked up was smoking. He knew it was wrong – but like sheep that went astray he stubbornly refused to give it up. It ended up destroying his life and he died a relatively young man of lung cancer.

E. Sheep need a Shepherd

- Sheep are relatively helpless animals (short sighted, fall and can’t get up, very weak, defenseless, fearful)
- The one thing that enables a sheep to survive and flourish is the care of the shepherd!
- If it were not for the tender watchful care of the shepherd – the sheep would not survive!
- The shepherd must provide guidance and direction
- The shepherd must provide protection and deliverance
- The shepherd must cleanse the sheep from filth and disease
- The shepherd must provide sustenance
- How like sheep we are! God must do all of these things with us!
- Throughout the Bible God is pictured as our provider and defender
- We see God protecting us and guiding us
- God has even provided “undershepherds” to meet our needs in a visible and tangible way! (OT – Priests and Prophets; NT- Pastors and Elders)

F. Sheep know the voice of their Shepherd

- One last parallel found in John chapter 10 – sheep know the voice of the shepherd and respond to it!

- Bible Times – one large corral and many flocks of sheep. In the morning the shepherds would come and one by one they would stand at the entrance and call their sheep. All the sheep milling around would hear the voice – but only the sheep who belonged to the shepherd would respond
- As they came to the shepherd they would pass beneath his staff and he would count them. Invariably he would be missing a sheep or two and he would wander through the mingling sheep until he spotted the identifying mark (usually on their ears) and he would take his staff and with the crook he would nudge or sometimes drag the wayward sheep to rest of his flock.
- Every one of us as God's sheep know the voice of God when he speaks.
- There are times when we do not respond to His voice – but it is usually not because we did not hear it or recognize it – it is because we did not want to do what He asked to do!
- From time to time in your life – maybe even this morning – God has spoken to your heart about a particular matter. Perhaps a sin that is in your life. Perhaps a job or a calling that He wants you to surrender to – and just like a sheep – you continue to mill around the flock as though God had never spoken to you!
- Then God must take his staff and come and find you and nudge you or even drag you to the place where you need to be!

III. The Point of Focus: on the Pastor or Shepherd

A. Our shepherd presented as the Good Shepherd who purchased the sheep: John 10; Psalm 22

- He is called the Good Shepherd, for one reason – he gave his life for the sheep! He purchased them with his blood!

Philip Keller "I truly belong to Him simply because He has bought me again at the incredible price of His own laid-down life and shed blood! Therefore he was entitled to say, 'I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.'"

"I recall quite clearly how in my first venture with sheep, the question of paying a price for my lambs was so terribly important. They belonged to me only by virtue of the fact that I paid hard cash for them. It was money earned by the blood, sweat, and tears drawn from my own body during the desperate grinding years of the depression. And when I bought that first small flock, I was buying them literally with my own body which had been laid down with this day in mind. Because of this I felt in a special way that they were in very truth a part of me and I a part of them. There was an intimate identity involved which, though not apparent on the surface to the casual observer, made those thirty lambs exceedingly precious to me! BUT the day I bought them, I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long ongoing endeavor in which, as their owner, I would have to continually lay down my life for them if they were to flourish and prosper – for you see- sheep do not 'just take care of themselves!' They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care!"

Measure of the Master's Men

Text: Ps 101:1-4

Theme: Living beyond Aimlessness

Intro:

- Some people seem to drift aimlessly through life headed in no specific direction.
- No clearly defined objectives—no definition or purpose to life.
- A lifestyle that is full of ups and downs—no spiritual consistency.
- Like a kite with no string—or a ship with no tiller—blown to and fro in any number of directions.
- You meet people like this every day—always after some new job, some big venture, some miracle cure, some great plan—BUT nothing ever seems to happen. They just drift along and grow old talking about the things they are going to do.
- Pretty soon you listen to these people and you smile inside knowing that the more they talk, the more things stay the same. Next week, next month, next year they will be off chasing some new venture.
- Problem: NO CONSISTENCY—AIMLESS—NO PURPOSE—NO SPECIFIC DIRECTION IN LIFE!
- Danger: like a ship with no tiller or a kite with no string—sooner or later—CRASH!

- Ps 101 written by David shortly after he had assumed the throne of the kingdom!
- Right off the bat he sets forth a list of things that will set the direction for his personal life (1-4) and his public ministry (5-8).
- Ten different times He uses the phrase “I will” or “I will not” do a particular thing.
- While most of us will never have a kingdom to rule, all of us do have a private life that we must direct toward a specific purpose.
- **How can we avoid the plague of aimlessness?**
- In these 4 verses David declares that he specifically would dedicate himself to 4 qualities that would guarantee a Godly purpose in his life.

I. Consistency: 1

- *I will sing of mercy and judgment, Unto thee, O Lord will I sing.*
- David here commits himself to consistently sing or praise the Lord. What will he sing or praise the Lord for?
- **Loyal Love: {Mercy}**
 - Literally Loving Kindness
 - David was committed to consistent attitude of praise to God for his loving kindness.
 - Do you take time consistently to praise God for his loving kindness to you or do you take it for granted?
- **Righteous Justness toward Men: {Judgment}**
 - It was easy for David to praise God during the times of blessing and the times of sunshine in his life.
 - BUT David also was willing to be consistent in praise to God when things were not so rosy.
 - When David fell into sin and had to come under the hard judgment of God he found time to praise God.
 - What about you? Do you praise God when the “sun” is shining in your life?
 - What about the times of crisis? What about the times of desperate need? What about when you have been hurt? When there is no money? What about the times when God brings judgment for sin? Do you praise God or do you blame God?

II. Integrity: 2

- I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when will you come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.
 - More than anything else, David wanted God to come and be his permanent guest.
 - He was willing to make some drastic changes in his life for this to happen.
 - Are you really willing for God to be a guest in your house?
- A. Public Integrity:** *I will give heed to the discreet and blameless way!*
- In my actions before others I will give consistent attention to being blameless in my public life.
 - What about you? Are there others who have observed your public behavior who would laugh if you tried to witness to them? What do your public actions say about you?
- **Private integrity:** *I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*
 - Even more important than what you are in public is what you are in private.
 - Your friends at work and at church may think you are a great Christian—but what do your children think? What does your wife think? What does your husband think?
 - Are you consistently living a blameless life at home?

III. Humility: 3

- Will set no wicked think before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.
- Two verses that are very important:
- Micah 6:8 *What does the Lord require of you but to do good, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*
- Humble here means carefully or circumspectly: {Illust—cat on wall with glass}
- 2nd verse is Joshua 23:6 *Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left.*
- David states that he hates or rejects the work of those that fall away—those that forsake the word of God. He will not allow them or their works to be a part of his life.
- The reason that so many Christians fall away from Christ is that they are not careful in how they live and what they allow in their lives.
- What about your unsaved friends? Do you allow their philosophy or their habits into your life? {Drinking buddies?}

IV. Purity: 4

- *A forward {perverse} heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.*
- Literally David is saying—I will actively, consistently refuse to know wickedness.
- In other words—David was actively and ardently committed to purity in his life.
- What about you? Are you committed to purity? What are you allowing in your life that will destroy your purity?
- Who are you allowing in your relationships that will destroy your purity?

Conclusion:

I wish that there were a happy ending to this psalm—but later in his ministry from the very house where he had determined to walk in integrity David brought in another man's wife and committed a terrible sin.

- He had determined to cast aside the perverse men from his life but later he surrounded himself with wicked and vain counselors who almost cost him his throne and destroyed his son Absalom.
 - POINT: It is not enough to know these truths in your head or even to say them with your lips or believe them in your heart—you must consistently practice them in your life.
-

The Foundation for Godly Living

Text: 119:1-3

- *How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How blessed are those who observe his testimonies, who seek him with all their heart. They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in all his ways. (NASV)*
- *Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the Law of the Lord. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do nothing wrong, they walk in his ways. (NIV)*

Introduction:

- The picture I am about to show you portrays for us in graphic and violent detail what happens to an individual and a nation when famine comes. (show picture)
- This man is absolutely powerless to help himself – too weak to even walk, he moves about in a pitiful crawl – too hungry to even be embarrassed at his nakedness.
- One of the things about extreme hunger – is that after you have gone through the initial stages of starvation—you no longer crave food—you no longer sense that you are hungry and your body after a period of time—begins to feed on itself.
- Left unchecked, it will start devouring the fatty cells and tissues and eventually it will literally eat away at the major life giving organs. People die of starvation because their body literally eats itself up!
- I am convinced that if we could take a picture of the modern church of Jesus Christ – maybe even of some of us in this room—from a spiritual standpoint – this is what we would look like!
- Some of us here are literally starving to death Spiritually!
- *The Lord, speaking through the prophet Amos put it this way – “The days are coming when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.”*
- Spiritually, many of us are staggering about – spiritually weak from lack of spiritual food – and we have been so hungry and so weak for so long that we don’t even realize our true condition.
- For many of us – the Bible is a closed book! We give lip service to its truth, we claim to love it, we send it to the foreign nations with our missionaries, we give it away at graduations and weddings, we defend its inspiration – in short – we do everything but what we are supposed to do with it – read it and apply it to our lives!
- If we are ever going to lay a strong and sure foundation for a successful Christian life then we must start with the Word of God.
- In fact, that is what the writer of the 119th Psalm is driving at – Note 4 things

I. God's Divine Imperative: Ps 119:4

- *Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, that we should keep them diligently.* (NASV)
- *You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed!* (NIV)

A. The Importance of the Precepts:

1. They are important because **God is their source!**
 - The word “precepts” is a military word that was used to describe an officer giving orders and details to his men that were vital to the success of the mission and essential to the survival and well-being of the men.
 - God here is pictured as the Commander-in-Chief and he has outlined or laid down “precepts” or orders for those who are under his command and in His army.
2. They are important because **they determine the outcome of our life.**
 - These “orders” are vital to the success of our mission and are absolutely essential to our survival and well-being.
 - How well we are able to carry out the mission that God has given to us will depend on how well we carry out the orders He has given.
 - How successful and beneficial our time on earth is spent is directly dependant on how much attention we give to the keeping of these precepts!
 - Well, if these precepts are so important – what are they like?

B. The Nature of the Precepts

1. Fully **Trustworthy**: Ps 119:137-38
 - *Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments. Thou hast commanded Thy testimonies in righteousness and exceeding faithfulness.* (NASV)
 - *Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous, they are fully trustworthy.* (NIV)
 - POINT: These orders are not designed to hurt us or to hamper us or to keep us from enjoying life to the fullest!
 - When God designed these laws—he exercised more than just his justice and righteousness—he exercised his faithfulness—his loyal love toward us!
 - These laws were designed for our benefit and therefore are fully trustworthy! There is no hidden agenda!
2. Thoroughly **Tested**: Ps 119:140
 - *Thy word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it!* (NASV)
 - *Your promises have been thoroughly tested and your servant love them.* (NIV)

- These laws are not “educated guesses” that have been derived from the best evidence and advice possible. God did not sit around heaven and speculate on what might work to help humans live successful and happy lives.
- These laws are absolutes—and we have been given an inspired record that gives us the stories of men who have thoroughly tested these precepts in their lives.
- We learn how God rewards and blesses those that live by this book in the lives of men like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David.
- We learn that God is not mistaken about the devastating consequences of sin from the lives of Achan, Able, and David with Bathsheba.
- THESE LAWS HAVE BEEN THOROUGHLY TESTED!

3. **Timelessly True:** 119:160

- *The sum of Thy word is truth, and every one of Thy righteous ordinances is everlasting! (NASV)*
- *All your words are true: all your righteous laws are eternal. (NIV)*
- These laws and principles are just as relevant and important today in our culture as they were in David’s day and in his culture!
- Well, now that I know what they are like—what does God expect?

C. **The Demands of the Precepts:**

1. Complete and Thorough Obedience (vs 4)

- *Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, that we should keep them **diligently**. (NASV)*
- *You have laid down precepts that are to be **fully obeyed**! (NIV)*

II. **Man’s Limited Options:**

- There are only two alternatives or options that a believer can choose when it comes to the orders that have been set forth by His Commander-in-Chief.

A. **Obey and Be Successful (Josh 1:8, Ps 1:2-3)**

- *This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be **careful** to do according to **all** that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (NASV)*
- *But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he will prosper. (NASV)*

- The outcome of a man's life – the success or failure of his life is directly dependant on how well and how carefully he gives attention to doing all that is written in God's Word!

B. Disregard and Fail (Ps 119:118)

- *Thou has rejected all those who wander from Thy statutes, for their deceitfulness is useless. (NASV)*
- *You reject all who stray from your decrees, for their deceitfulness is in vain. (NIV)*
- When a person for whatever reason and in whatever way turns away from God's Word and lives outside its boundaries – the Bible states that man is inevitably headed for spiritual and often physical failure!
- Most of us are not going to deny God's Word verbally – however, we end up neglecting it and we refuse to live our lives governed by its principles.
- We read things in God's Word and then come to the conclusion that for whatever reasons they do not work or apply for us today.
- Worse than this is the fact that we give great lip service to God's Word—we come to hear it preached on a weekly basis—but it plays no real part in our lives!
- We live our lives as if God had never left us any orders or any directions to live by!

III. The Multiple Benefits:

A. The Word of God offers Protection from Sin: Ps 119:11

- *Thy word have I treasured (Hidden, buried) in my heart, that I might not sin against you!*
- *When you internalize God's word, it serves as a protection or vaccine against sin!*

B. The Word of God Offers Purification from Sin: Ps 119:9

- *How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word!*
- In other words, if you want to live a pure life and keep it pure—then you are going to have live by the guidelines that God has set forth!

C. The Word of God Breaks the Domination of Sin: Ps 119:133

- *Establish my footsteps in Thy word, and do not let any iniquity have dominion over me! (NASV)*
- *Direct my footsteps according to thy word; let no sin rule over me!*

D. The Word of God Removes the Shame of Sin: Ps 119:22, 39

- *Take away reproach and contempt from me, for I observe thy testimonies... Turn away my reproach which I dread, for thine ordinances are good.*

E. The Word of God Provides Wisdom for Life and Service: Ps 119:24, 66, 130

- *Your statutes are my delight... they are my counselors! (Advisors)*
- *Teach me knowledge and good judgment for I believe in your commandments.*
- *The unfolding of your word gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*

F. The Word of God Provides Strength for the Battles of Life: Ps 119:28

- *My soul is weary with sorrow—strengthen me according to Thy Word. (NIV)*

G. The Word of God Provides Peace and Stability: Ps 110:15

- *Great peace have they who love your law and nothing can make them stumble!*

H. The Word of God Provides Comfort in Suffering: Ps 119:49-52

- *Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. The arrogant mock me without restraint, but I do not turn from your law. For I remember your ancient laws, O Lord, and I find comfort in them.*
- Many people want to go to other people – friends, family, pastors, etc. hoping to find comfort in the valleys of life—here is where the only true comfort can be found.

I. The Word of God Provides Refuge and Shelter from Spiritual Danger: Ps 119:114

- *You are my refuge and my shield—I have put my hope (confidence) in your word! (NIV)*

J. The Word of God Provides True Joy and Happiness: Ps 119:97-103, 111-112

- *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders for I obey your precepts... How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (NIV)*
- *Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. (NIV)*
-

IV. The Necessary Activity: Ps 119:15-16

- *I will meditate on Thy precepts and regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word. (NASV)*
- *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (NIV)*
- If we are ever going to make God's Word the foundation of our lives – then two very specific and very difficult things must take place:

A. Meditate: *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.*

- This is basically the same thought that Joshua received when God told him not to let the book of the law depart from his mouth.
- The word meditate carries the picture of an animal chewing its food carefully so as to receive maximum flavor and benefit. Specifically used to describe a cow “chewing its cud.” It would never chew the food one time and swallow it and be done – it would chew the food over and over.
- Meditation can't be done in five short minutes – it can't be done on the run. It can't be rushed and it is impossible when the busyness of life is not shut out! The two things that meditation demands are concentration and time!
- We are a nation of people who have never learned to concentrate on anything for more than 12 to 15 minutes (the average length between commercials.)
- We are a nation of people driven by the demands of time and we often are too busy to do the really essential and important things of spiritual life!
- “Beware of the emptiness of a busy life!”
- We have learned to survive on “fast-food” and we are now paying the price physically!
- We have learned to survive on “spiritual fast-food” and we are now paying the price!
- For many of us – church is like Burger King – fast, tasty, and done our way!
- The end result is that many of us are undernourished and spiritually sick in a serious way!

B. Incorporate: *I will not neglect your word.*

- In other words – I will not disregard what I have learned from meditating on your word!
- Here is where most of us drop the ball – it is not so much that we do not know where to go for the answer – in fact, we know what the answer is in many situations – the real problem lies in incorporating God's answer into our daily lives.

- This is not something that anyone else can do – no pastor can do it for you – no amount of counseling, no amount of pressure or exhortation from others can accomplish this.
- In the end it comes down to this one question—who is really going to sit on the throne of your heart! Who is going to sit in the driver’s seat? Well—God is of course! THEN MOVE OVER AND LET HIM DRIVE!

Conclusion: Here is how the author describes the conclusion he arrived at in the inner chambers of his heart.

- *May my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to thy word.*
- *May my supplication come before you, deliver me according to your promise.*
- *May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.*
- *May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.*
- *May your hand be reaching to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.*
- *I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.*
- *Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me.*
- *I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant...for I have not forgotten your commands.*

Introduction to Psalm 119

In this initial installment, I want to introduce you to the psalm itself. Psalm 119 consists of 176 verses arranged in 22 stanzas. Each stanza contains eight verses. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet and the author has carefully composed the psalm as a specialized acrostic where each stanza corresponds to a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Additionally, the first word of each verse in each of the stanzas begins with the Hebrew letter assigned to that stanza. For example, all the verses in the first stanza (verses 1-8) begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph. The only other example in the Bible of an extended portion of Scripture designed this way is the book of Lamentations. One of the reasons the Psalmist may have done this was to make it easier to memorize this psalm. Another important reason may have been his desire to communicate the completeness of what he had to say about his theme. In other words, Psalm 119 was designed to communicate from “A to Z” on the topic of God’s Word.

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Without question, this kind of careful and deliberate thought alerts the reader to the importance and significance of the message contained in the psalm. This message is revealed by the structure of the psalm itself as the importance of God’s Word for life and godliness. There are eight different words referring to God’s Word that occur throughout the psalm. In most cases, most of the eight words occur at least once in each of the 22 stanza. The first word, *law*, is the primary word used in this psalm to refer to God’s Word. In its broadest sense, “law” refers to any instruction revealed by God as the basis for life and action. In its more narrow sense “law” can refer to the Mosaic Law, the Pentateuch, or the Deuteronomic Law. Psalm 119 presents the Law of God as His overall instruction and direction whereby His people may find life, blessing, and success. The second term, *testimonies*, has the idea of “witness.” One commentator observed that the “Law of God is His testimony because it is His own witness to His nature, attributes, actions, and consequent demands. . . . This term emphasizes both the authority of their source in the LORD, and the accountability of their reception by men.” God’s Word holds men accountable to the God of the Word and witnesses against them when they fail to meet the standards contained therein (Deut. 31:26). The third word used by the psalmist for God’s Word is *precepts*. This term comes from the image of an officer or overseer giving specific instructions to be carried out by others. God’s Word articulates the specific instructions and expectations He has for His people, and for which they will be accountable. The next term, *statutes*, speaks to the permanence and the binding nature of God’s Word. God’s statutes have been written down and preserved because God’s desires His people to obey them always and without exception. God’s words are always valid. To be sure, God’s people must give careful attention to how certain parts of God’s Word are to be applied in their cultural context but at the end of the day, God has spoken once and we must give glad and consistent obedience to what God has said. The term *commandments* is related in thought to the statutes of the Lord. However, this term focuses attention on the lawful authority behind the words. God’s statutes are binding because they are His commandments and as such, are backed by His authority as the supreme, sovereign, and moral Law-giver. Yet another term used by the psalmist to describe God’s Word is *ordinances*. An ordinance refers to a decision or legal judgment handed down by a judge in a court of law or by a ruler settling a dispute among his subjects. The psalmist uses this term to describe the judgments and decisions from God about matters related to the affairs of His people. In general terms an ordinance refers to God’s revealed will or decision about a matter related to common human situations. In particular, God’s ordinances in the Old Testament were His commands that formed the basis of Israel’s legal system. The final two terms are *word* and *promises*. The former is the most general term for God’s Word and

encompasses the sum total of God's truth in any form whether stated, promised, or commanded. The latter word can have this broader meaning but more often it refers to a specific statement made by God which He intends to fulfill.

At the heart of this psalm is the truth that God's Word is necessary for living a life that pleases God. But, the psalmist acknowledges that apart from God's enablement, he is powerless to understand or obey what God has said. And so, as one commentator observed, "This man of God never besought God merely to teach him His Word but to form within him the way of that Word." Whoever the psalmist was, he understood the ultimate end of God's Word was to shape his life and that the means for doing so was obeying what God had revealed with a full hearted obedience rising from proper attitudes and motives toward God and His Word. And, this obedience was to manifest itself in all of life's ways

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It is evident from the internal evidence of this psalm that its writer was acquainted with the struggle of living for God in a world that had abandoned Him. One writer observed, "The psalmist knows firsthand the oppression of evil. He has been surrounded by wickedness, pursued by the arrogant and proud, humbled by sorrow and disgrace; yet his refuge is in God. He constantly cries out to God, retreats into His shadow, and finds solace in His strength. This is a psalm not only of law, but of love, not only of statute, but of spiritual strength, not only of devotion to precept, but of loyalty to the way of the Lord!"

So, who was this man? What were the circumstances that produced such powerful and wondrous words from the Lord? Some have argued that these were David's words penned toward the end of his life as a testimony both to the value of God's Word for guiding one's life and to the power of God's Word for cleansing one's life from sin and error. Others believe this psalm came from the pen of Ezra, the ready Scribe in the Law of Moses. My own opinion is that this Psalm was written during the time of Israel's long exile in Babylon and that its author was most likely the prophet Daniel. One commentator defending Daniel's authorship makes this case:

He, above all men whose lives are in the Old Testament recorded to us, had in his youth cleansed his way by guarding it according to God's word (cf. v. 9). Cast as a stranger and a pilgrim in a foreign land (vv.19, 54), yet still assured that God's mercies would be vouchsafed to his servants wheresoever in the wide earth they might dwell (v. 64), he had found God's testimonies far dearer to him than all manner of worldly wealth (vv. 14, 36, 37, 72, 127). Reproached (vv. 22, 23), derided (v. 51), slandered (v. 69), and plotted against (vv. 78, 85, 86, 95, 110, 161) by the proud princes whom he had never wronged . . . he had yet spoken of God's testimonies even before kings, and had not been ashamed (v. 46). . . . The whole psalm bespeaks the character of one who, like Daniel, lived in close and habitual communion with God; one habitually trained from his youth upwards in secret self-discipline, the peaceful flow of his whole saintly career was not marked by the ruggedness which would generally flow, as in the case of St. Paul, from sudden conversion, or by the fitfulness attaching to lives that, like David's, have been once disordered by acts of heinous transgression; one indeed who was not without spot, who confessed his sin, who relied only on God's grace to reclaim him from the many strayings of which he was conscious (v. 176); but yet "a man greatly beloved," one of the pure in heart who might see God, and whom therefore God numbered, along with the patriarch Joseph and

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the evangelist St. John, among the special few to whom he partially unlocked the secrets of the times and seasons of the future.

However, God has chosen in His providence to withhold the identity of the author that we, the readers, might focus on the applicability of the psalm to the circumstances of life that are common to all of God's people. Psalm 119 is an expanded commentary on what it means to be a "blessed man . . . whose delight is in the Law of the Lord" (Psalm 1:1-2).

How are we to benefit from this psalm? How are we to use it for life and Godliness?

Read it regularly. In order for the Word to impact our hearts, it must be ingested by means of regular reading. One way in which this might be done with this psalm is to take each section and read it daily during the course of one week. By repeated reading in this way, it is possible to become thoroughly acquainted with the content of the psalm during the course of a normal school year. Both the brevity and the content of each section make this an ideal psalm to use either in personal or family devotions.

Meditate on it carefully. One commentator entitled his work on this psalm, "The Word of God in the Child of God." One must go beyond mere familiarity in order for this psalm to have its intended effect on daily living. For this to happen, meditation on the truths contained in each section is essential. Perhaps the best and most profitable way for this to happen is to select a good commentary on this psalm and read it along with the section in focus for that week. One of the best works on this psalm from a devotional standpoint is the three volume set on *Psalms* by James Montgomery Boice. Spurgeon's *Treasury of David* also contains many wonderful devotional thoughts drawn from these verses. Those desiring to go a bit deeper will find a great deal of help in an older commentary written in 1827 by Charles Bridges entitled *Psalm 119*. For the truly committed, Thomas Manton's three volume work on *Psalm 119* will prove to be a treasury of truth. My personal favorite is a work by a former professor of mine, George Zemek, entitled *The Word of God in the Child of God*. I have found it helpful to read the section of the psalm and then work my way slowly through that section in the commentary. I keep a highlighter handy and will make note ideas or information that impacts me in the margins of my Bible next to the verse itself.

Apply it personally. Obviously the goal of this repeated reading and careful study is genuine life change. The means by which the change will come about is whole hearted obedience based on belief in what God has said through the psalmist. As we read and believe we must come to depend on God to conform our life accordingly. It would be most tragic to spend a year reading and meditating on this portion of God's Word and come away unchanged. One of the ways to facilitate this process is to personally pray for the things the psalmist requests from God in this psalm. For example, the "HE" stanza (verses 33 – 40) contains nine specific requests the psalmist makes of God. You can take each of these requests and ask God in prayer to grant them to you personally.

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Memorize it diligently. The idea of memorizing a portion of Scripture of this length is daunting to most of us. However, many of God's children have successfully memorized this psalm and have found the exercise to be of great spiritual benefit. For example, John Ruskin was a layman who lived over 100 years ago. His mother taught him to memorize Scripture as a boy and one of the portions she helped him memorize was Psalm 119. He spoke of this years later and said, "It is strange that of all the pieces of the Bible which my mother taught me, that which cost me most to learn, and which was to my childish mind, chiefly repulsive—the 119th Psalm—has now become of all the most precious to me in its overflowing and

glorious passion of love for the Law of God.” William Wilberforce, the famous British politician who almost single-handedly brought down the practice of slavery in England spoke of the comfort he gained on occasions when he would quote the 119th psalm. The famous missionary to India, Henry Martyn, memorized this psalm as did David Livingstone, missionary to Africa. Perhaps the most unusual story of the benefit to memorizing this psalm is the story of George Wishart, Bishop of Edinburgh in the 16th century. It seems that he found himself in a difficult spot after being condemned to death. He was confident of a pardon that had not yet arrived even at the moment he stood on the scaffold to meet his fate. Taking advantage of the time honored tradition of allowing the condemned man to pray a psalm, Wishart chose to recite in prayer the text of the 119th psalm. Before he was finished praying the delayed pardon arrived and his life was spared. One can only imagine his ill fortune had he not memorized this psalm.

In the weeks ahead we will explore the structure of the psalm itself as well as the content and truth for life found in each stanza. It is my prayer for all of us, that as we study this psalm, we will find all that we need for life and godliness. May the Lord help us to love, learn, and live out this psalm in our daily walk with God.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Looking Back at the Path

For several editions now we have been examining Psalm 119. We have discovered that whoever wrote this psalm had a deep desire to live a life pleasing to God. And, this was no mere whim or fleeting thought banished by the first obstacle or trial encountered on the path. His desire, as well as the path by which such a life could be lived, is meticulously detailed in the twenty-two stanzas which compose the psalm. Since our study has stretched out over a number of editions of “Truth Talk,” I thought it would be helpful to step back and review the path we have been walking with the Psalmist before moving ahead to the next segment of the psalm.

We began by observing that although the authorship of the psalm is unknown, of the probable candidates, perhaps the most likely is the prophet Daniel. As you may recall, I mentioned George Zemek made a convincing case for this position in his helpful commentary, *The Word of God in the Child of God*. By the way, his commentary has also helped shape the structure of the outlines in this series.

Daniel, or whoever the author was, set out what in essence is an extended answer to Psalm One. The Psalter opens with a psalm depicting two ways traveled by two kinds of men who will arrive at two distinct and different ends. One path, the path of blessing, is traveled by the righteous man, who, for his obedience, will prosper and be blessed. The other path, the cursed way, is traveled by the wicked, who, for his disobedience, will perish. Psalm One describes the righteous man as “fortunate” or blessed. And, the secret to becoming such a person is one’s approach to the Law of the Lord, the Bible. Those who delight in this Law and make it their constant mediation will prosper. Those who don’t will perish.

The writer of Psalm 119 alludes to the truth of Psalm One by pointing out the reality of what it stated about people who choose the path of righteousness. They truly are fortunate. The path of righteousness is here presented positively in terms of what these people are consistently like. They constantly maintain a blameless life by walking in the Law of God (119:1). They always seek after God with a whole heart and are committed to obeying His testimonies (119:2). In short, they do not live like the wicked – they don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). Instead, they diligently and persistently walk in God’s designed ways (119:3-4). And, as a result, they are blessed by God (119:1, 2).

Not only does the Psalmist point to such models, he is himself determined to live this way (119:5-8). The rest of this psalm is the record of his attempt to live out his commitment to be a blessed man—the godly man of Psalm 1:1-3. He ends the first stanza by recognizing that such a life is impossible apart from Divine assistance (119:8).

The first thing required if he is to truly live as the individuals mentioned in 119:1-4 is a radical, life-long, internal delight in God's law (Psalm 1:2; 119:9-16). God's law must be his meditation (119:15) and his delight (119:16). Consequently, he will not be ignorant of, or depart from, the way of life that pleases God. God's Word will keep his life pure (119:9) and prevent him from going astray (119:10-11). But, mere possession of God's Word is insufficient for such living. For this Divine instruction is needed (119:12). Only when God does an internal work in his heart will the Psalmist truly rejoice and delight in the Word that he possesses.

So, the first stanza (vv. 1-8) stresses the priority of personal obedience to God's Word as the foundation for living a life that pleases God. The second stanza (vv. 9-16) reveals such obedience requires an attitude that desires to know God's Word as well as an aptitude to diligently retain and obey the instruction contained therein. In other words, the first stanza speaks of the blessing that comes to a person who is determined to live in wholehearted obedience to God's Word, and the second stanza reveals that inner delight and commitment required for such blessing.

In the third stanza (vv 17-24) we are, for the first time in this psalm, introduced to the reality that trials and afflictions will be the expected lot of one who chooses the path introduced in the first two stanzas. And, these trials and affliction will come specifically from those who are not on the righteous path (vv 21-23). We have been so accustomed to thinking that the blessing promised to those who live in accordance with God's Word necessarily involves ease, comfort, and prosperity when in fact the opposite is true. While it is an assured promise from God's Word that the man who seeks God and commits to His Word will be blessed, that blessing does not at all preclude trial and affliction. This stanza demonstrates that the psalmist who so passionately exhorts his readers to pursue God through His Word is not exception. Yet, even in the midst of the affliction and trial, the psalmist reveals that the path to blessing and bountiful life is found in a continued obedience and dedication to God's Word rather than to the natural responses arising in one's heart at such times and under such circumstances. And, in the midst of his deep affliction, the psalmist lifts his voice to God and prays.

If our contention regarding Daniel's authorship is correct than it is not hard to imagine Daniel, knowing that the Chaldean counselors were plotting his demise and speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, committing himself afresh to his continual practice of seeking out God's Words and making them his own counselors! And if we are at all correct in this surmising, Daniel's triumph over the lions (those in the den as well as those in the court) is a comforting reminder that there is indeed bountiful life for those who choose to follow the path established by God's Word rather than leaning to their own understandings when confronted with fierce opposition and strong affliction.

In a powerful statement, the Psalmist reveals his response to affliction and persecution is governed by a deliberate and careful study of God's ordinances, particularly those associated with what God required for worship and access (statutes in v. 23). No personal vendetta or revenge wrongfully taken was worth losing this access to God in worship.

Finally, the psalmist contrasts the wicked counselors who everywhere attacked him with the counselors who were always with him and who were for him not against him. These counselors were God's testimonies or His works and words. These counselors are always available and their counsel is unerringly accurate and faithful. And in following them, Daniel found life and favor before both the King of Heaven and the earthly monarch he served and at times suffered under.

So it will always be for God's faithful servants. If we are truly living in the way of Heaven we are going to be necessarily strangers and aliens on earth and we can expect to be treated correspondingly. When we suffer unfairly and we need relief from the pressures that come because we are aliens, we must turn to God and continue to lay hold on His Word. When we desperately desire respect we must seek it first from God and only then will we be in a place to receive it from men in due time. In either case, believers must commit themselves afresh to keeping the Word of God as the reason for wanting more life and this will only happen when God opens our eyes and causes us to see that the wonders in His Word far surpass any earthly delight. Then, and only then, will we desire to live for the right reason.

These opening stanzas reveal one man's decision to model his life after the testimony of righteous men who preceded him. They also reveal that such living will require divine assistance to understand and delight in God's Word as the guidebook for the journey. Nor will the journey be easy. Those on this path will encounter strong opposition from those on the other path. But, with God's testimonies as his counselors, the pilgrim will not walk the journey alone or unaided. May this be our experience in the journey ahead.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Delighting in Divine Demands The Blessing of Obeying

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD! ² Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart! ³ They also do no iniquity; They walk in His ways. ⁴ You have commanded us To keep Your precepts diligently. (Psalm 119:1-4)

For many editions of *Truth Talk* we have been studying the individual stanzas which make up this important psalm. The advantage of such a detailed, bite-sized study is that we get a thorough look at each part of the psalm. The disadvantage is that a protracted study of this nature might cause us to lose sight of the big picture of which each piece is a part. So in this edition of *Truth Talk* I thought it would be profitable to look at the ground we have covered from a particular perspective that will help us to recapture and retain the big picture presented by God in this portion of His Word.

We began by noting the writer used the structure and arrangement of this Psalm to alert us to its importance. Its alphabetic arrangement points to the author's intention that we grasp and retain this material. Now it is certainly true that all of God's Word is important and merits our careful study and attention. However, the structural arrangement of this material alerts us that these twenty-two stanzas are particularly important for our spiritual walk before God. To bring this into our world we might observe that the writer intends to give us the "A-B-C's" of something. Or we might observe that he is trying to take us from "A to Z" on a particular spiritual subject. But what exactly is this foundational and comprehensive material about? What is the subject to which all of this attention and focus is directed? The repeated terms for the Scripture which occur in every verse but two reveal that the subject of this psalm is the Word of God.

The opening verses of the psalm present a powerful observation – there are some men among all men who are uniquely blessed by God. These men all have lives that are distinctly marked by a blamelessness sourced in a personal, consistent commitment to live obediently under the authority of God as expressed in the commandments and expectations set forth in His Word. In verse four, the Psalmist reminds us that God has "ordained precepts" and He wants us to "keep them diligently."

Immediately after making the observation that out of all men are some who are particularly blessed by God and noting that their fortunate condition is tied to their committed obedience to His precepts, the Psalmist articulated his decision to number

himself among these men by joining them on this path – the path of God’s Word (v. 5).

In essence, the rest of the psalm is a call for the reader to join the Psalmist on this path and an explanation of what such a walk will entail. And, at the heart of what will be demanded of all who choose this path is a commitment to “keep” God’s precepts. So, if we desire to keep these precepts, I thought it would be helpful for us to spend this edition of *Truth Talk* examining what the Psalmist reveals about God’s precepts in order that we might delight in them internally and do them consistently.

I. The Importance of God’s Precepts

If we are to understand this dimension of the Psalmist’s message, we must understand that God’s precepts are of supreme importance. This is called to our attention by the Psalmist’s reminder that God has laid down precepts and has commanded us to obey them diligently (v. 4).

As we have seen earlier in our study, a “precept” is an order from a superior to a subordinate. In the military it would refer to the commands or orders of an officer to an enlisted man. Those orders would carry weight and authority because of their source. The higher the rank of the officer, the greater the weight and authority of the order. In this psalm, the “orders” come from the highest ranking Being in the Universe. There is no higher authority. Consequently, His orders must be given due consideration.

When we rightly consider these precepts and the authority they bear, we will respond by diligently obeying God’s instruction. The term diligently describes the manner of our obedience. We will obey thoroughly. Completely. Readily. Promptly. Properly and respectfully. And we will do so with a right heart toward the One who issued those instructions.

II. The Nature of God’s Precepts

But the Psalmist wants us to know more than just the importance of these precepts. He wants us to understand their nature. For if we understand what these precepts are like, we will give our diligently obedience more readily.

First, the Psalmist reminds us that God’s precepts are fully trustworthy. *Righteous are You, O LORD, And upright are Your judgments.*¹³⁸ *Your testimonies, which You have commanded, Are righteous and very faithful* (vv. 137-138). These “orders” and “instructions” were not designed to unduly restrict us from what is good or to harm us in some way. Instead, they were designed for our benefit and are fully trustworthy. Because they are sourced in the righteousness of God, they are good and upright instructions and they lead to good and beneficial ends and consequences for those who obey them diligently.

Second, these precepts are thoroughly tested. *Your word is very pure; Therefore Your servant loves it* (v. 140). The image intended by the idea of “pure” is that of something that has been thoroughly tested and approved. These orders are not “educated guesses. They were given by One who is omniscient and therefore they are trustworthy because they are thoroughly reliable. And their reliability is displayed in the lives of many of the Bible characters with which the reader would be familiar. For example, we see the reliability of God’s precepts as we note God’s providential

working and blessing in the life of those who obeyed them in examples like Abraham, Joseph, and Moses. We also see their reliability and trustworthiness when we observe the disastrous and tragic consequences of disregarding them as illustrated in the lives of Cain, Lot, and Achan.

Finally, these precepts are timelessly true. *The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever (v. 160).* All of God's Word is true and reliable and His decisions and precepts are timelessly true. This does not mean that we are to therefore go back to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. It does mean that the same God is on the throne in our day and His Word, rightly interpreted, is as accurate and relevant for us as it was for the Psalmist. So, how are we then to live? How are we to respond to these righteous precepts that are fully trustworthy, thoroughly tested, and timelessly true?

III. The Responses to God's Precepts

There are only two basic responses that a man can have to these precepts. He can believe them and obey or he can lean to his own understanding and choose to disregard them.

As obvious as it might seem, God has even chosen to address which of these two options He requires of those who are in a committed relationship with Him. God requires complete and thorough obedience (v. 4) that is continual and steadfast in its expression (v. 5). In other words, we are to obey God's instructions in all things, in all ways, and at all times.

The Scriptures also acknowledge that man has another option. He can choose to obey diligently and prosper (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3, 6) or he can choose to disregard and fail. The Psalmist warned against the latter with this strong warning: *You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, For their deceit is falsehood (v. 118).* However, he also points out the multiple benefits of diligent obedience.

IV. The Benefits of Obeying God's Precepts

The Word of God offers protection from sin (v. 11) as well as purification from the effects of sin (v. 9). By obeying these precepts diligently a man can break the domination of sin in his life (v. 133). Diligent pursuit of God's demands is the way to remove the shame past sin has brought upon a man (vv. 22, 39). These divine instructions provide wisdom and direction for life and service (vv. 24, 66, 130). They provide strength and sustenance during the trials and difficulties of life (v. 28). They are a source of comfort in suffering (vv. 49-52). They provide refuge and shelter from spiritual danger (v. 114). They result in true joy and enduring happiness (vv. 97-103, 111-112).

In short, these precepts will furnish the man of God with everything he needs for life, godliness, and Christian service. No wonder the Psalmist cried out, *Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word.*¹⁷⁰ *Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.*¹⁷¹ *My lips shall utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.*¹⁷² *My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.*¹⁷³ *Let Your hand become my*

help, For I have chosen Your precepts. ¹⁷⁴ I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight. ¹⁷⁵ Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me. ¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments (vv. 169-176)!

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Becoming Obedient and Faithful

Stanza 2 – Verses 9-16

The central theme of Psalm 119 is the importance of the Word of God for shaping the thinking and ways of those who desire to be blessed by God. This message is set forth in twenty-two stanzas arranged as an alphabetic acrostic. Each stanza supports and develops the centrality of God's Word as the primary and foundational means of living a life that pleases God. The first stanza introduced this theme and drew attention to the priority of keeping God's Word personally and passionately in every venue of life. But, how is the reader to accomplish this daunting task? The psalmist has already informed him that such an endeavor will require divine enablement from God. In the second stanza, the psalmist continues to probe this question and reveals the divine means by which a person may cultivate a life that is clean and pleasing to the Lord. The question at hand is, "How can a man so shape his character that his resulting conduct is pure, right, and in line with God's expectations?" The eight verses comprising this section provide a three-fold answer. This worthy aspiration will require a heart attitude oriented to such a pursuit. This attitude must drive the seeker to the right source for direction in his pursuit. And, it will require the passionate and consistent investment of committed effort as one personally engages in this pursuit.

Before looking at the three sections that occupy the psalmist in this stanza, it will be helpful to dwell briefly on the overarching emphasis of these eight verses. That emphasis is articulated in the opening question, "How can a young man keep his way pure before Yahweh?" Clearly, this is a reference to personal sanctification and if, as has been suggested, Daniel is the psalmist, this question takes on very profound implications in a context much like ours. The psalmist's question is not prompted merely by theological or academic interests but rather by a deep desire to live acceptably before God in the crucible of daily life in the midst of a hostile and pagan culture. How will he face the daily temptations and pressures in such an environment and do so without sinning before God? The challenge is immense and personal and the stakes are huge. How to pursue a life that pleases God and meet the legitimate expectations of the surrounding culture without compromise or defilement is no small task. Any hope of success is tied immediately to a source of instruction by which his life may be guided and guarded from sin or error. That source is identified as the Word of Yahweh.

As the psalmist lives out the daily decisions and activities of life he does so according to or regulated by God's word. In other words, the emphasis goes beyond mere knowledge of Yahweh's Word for information's sake alone. Instead, the emphasis is most certainly on the concept of valuing, retaining, and abiding in the "ways" of Yahweh so that his ways are conformed to God's ways. And the "ways" of God are only known as they are revealed by the "Word" of God. Therefore, what is required is the diligent study in, devoted meditation upon, and delighted application of that Word.

God's Word is powerful to cleanse a life from sin morally, emotionally, physically, and relationally. This cleansing comes as one heeds what God has said about repentance, restitution, renewal, and forgiveness. But, all of this requires one's entire life effort. One may not advance by half-hearted attempts. Such pursuit demands devoting one's entire heart to this process because only a person wholly devoted to this will be concerned enough to

learn God's Word to the point of intuitively apply it to every situation encountered along life's journey.

A person who has come to this level of commitment to pursue a pure life that pleases God will be marked by his deep valuing of God's Word. Yahweh's Word is priceless to such a person and valued as much as if not more so than vast wealth. Most of us if genuinely given the opportunity to procure vast wealth would exert all due diligence to obtain it. The psalmist is clearly stating this same ardent desire is present in him toward God's Word. It is that valuable to him. The reason is revealed in the logical progression of ideas set forth in the verses that follow. A life conformed to the ways of God is of inestimable worth. Such a life is only possible when shaped by the Word of God which accurately reveals the ways of God. And, since this is so, people who desire to live in consistent obedience to God in all things must constantly reflect and meditate upon God's Word so that they remember the instruction it reveals and this will only happen as they delight in the "will" of God as revealed in His laws or statutes.

So, in short, a person who desires to pursue a life that pleases God in the crucible of real world living must be a person whose ways are conformed to God's ways. This requires a personal, constant, and consistent commitment to knowing the ways of God and obeying the will of God as revealed by the Word of God.

The stress on personal sanctification and the means by which one may obtain it is developed by directing the reader to personally ponder the Word of God in order to discover and practice the will of God in all areas of life. This stanza reveals three key requirements essential to such pursuit. I am indebted to George Zamek's insightful comments in this section of his commentary, *The Word of God in the Child of God*.

First, the pursuit of personal sanctification will require the right attitude (vv. 9-11). This attitude will manifest itself in an awareness of my need to pursue sanctification in daily living as well as an acknowledgement that this endeavor will require a wholehearted sustained life energy on my part. Furthermore, the wholehearted pursuit is accompanied by the accrual or treasuring up of God's Word in my inner man in order to avoid sinful behavior, thought, or speech.

Second, the pursuit of personal sanctification must be directed to the right source (v. 12). In order to live obediently before God, I must know His expectations. If I am to direct my steps in ways that please Him, I must know the path He has set forth. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the source of personal sanctification is outside of myself. Left to my own strength and wisdom, I have no hope of success. However, God is the source to which the psalmist directs my pursuit. His strength and His direction are more than external guides for the journey, they are internal fountains of strength for the journey. This is so because of God's righteous character and because of His capability to instruct men by the binding and permanent force of the nature of His divine prescriptions (statutes) for life.

Third, the pursuit of personal sanctification will require a sustained effort (vv 13-16). This effort will be demonstrated in my verbal testimony regarding God's declarations (v. 13). In other words, my speech will be shaped and directed by God's speech. My effort will be demonstrated by the adoption of proper priorities in this life (v. 14). It will be reflected both by my diligent study (v. 15) and my unwavering resolution to remember and apply God's Word to every circumstance and situation in life.

And so to summarize, the first eight verses of this psalm ("Aleph" stanza) introduce the goal expected of every believer – living to please the Lord. The means God has provided for the reaching of this objective is revealed in the second eight verses ("Beth" stanza) – personal accrual and application of God's Word to all of life. In the next edition of Truth Talk we will take a closer look at each of the three sections of this stanza.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Becoming Obedient and Faithful

Stanza 2a – Verses 9-11

Welcome to another edition of “Truth Talk.” As we have seen in our study of Psalm 119, the central theme presented by the psalmist is the importance of the Word of God for shaping the thinking and ways of those who desire to be blessed by God. Each of the twenty-two stanzas supports and develops the centrality of God’s Word as the primary and foundational means of living a life that pleases God. The first stanza stressed the priority of keeping God’s Word personally and passionately in every venue of life. In the second stanza, the psalmist revealed the divine means by which a person may cultivate a life that is clean and pleasing to the Lord. The question at hand is, “How can a man so shape his character that his resulting conduct is pure, right, and in line with God’s expectations?” The eight verses comprising this section provide a three-fold answer. This worthy aspiration will require a heart attitude oriented to such a pursuit. This attitude must drive the seeker to the right source for direction in his pursuit. And, it will require the passionate and consistent investment of committed effort as one personally engages in this pursuit.

The psalmist wants us to note that success in this endeavor will only come about as we love, learn, and live out God’s ways to the point that our ways become like His ways. So, the real secret then is to discover where one can learn and understand God’s ways. It is important to remember that when we speak of God’s “ways” we are really referring to what God is like. In other words, we are speaking about God’s unchanging character. The term “ways” refers to the ethical outflow of one’s life and conduct, and this stems from one’s character. When we say we want to know God’s ways, we are really asking about His character. What is He really like? And the answer to this question has been given to us by God Himself in His Word. God’s Word is both the revelation and a reflection of His character. This means that if I am going to live a life pleasing to God then I am going to have to conform my ways (character) to His ways (character) as revealed in His Word. This will require that I come to this objective with a commitment to cultivate and maintain a right attitude in this process. That attitude will consistently manifest three important elements.

First, I must come with an attitude that demonstrates a spiritual awareness of my need (v. 9). I must acknowledge that I need to pursue personal holiness and sanctification precisely because I don’t have it and God demands and expects it of me! Furthermore, I must demonstrate my awareness that this purity will be cultivate, implemented, and preserved in me only as my life is shaped by, conformed to, and sustained in God’s Word. This is the short answer to the big question raised in this stanza, “how can a person keep his life pure?” Later in the psalm, the psalmist will give a more expanded and specific answer, but for now at the start of the journey, he reveals the primary answer to the age old dilemma of how to live purely in an impure world. That answer in short is to give constant and devoted attention to knowing and obeying God’s Word.

Not only must I be aware of the importance of God’s Word in my pursuit for personal purity, my attitude must also acknowledge a wholehearted desire to please God. And this acknowledgment must be a true reflection of my genuine desire. It is one thing to say I want to live in ways that please the Lord, it is another thing entirely for such living to be the actual genuine desire of my life. Only when this is so will I passionately pursue the conforming of

my ways to God's. It has been fashionable in some quarters to divorce the pursuit of knowing God from the study of His Word. The Psalmist gives no ground to such irrational thinking. Here he specifically links the desire of his heart – a passionate full-orbed personal pursuit of God – with an intense dependency on God's Word. Clearly the psalmist sees that the only way to truly know God is through the Word of God given by God as His Self-revelation.

However, this is far from an external self-dependent attempt to please God in one's own strength. Apart from enablement through God's grace, we are powerless to live out what we have discovered in God's Word. This is expressed in the psalmist's strong plea of desperate dependence on God, "Do not let me wander or stray from Your commandments" (v. 10).

The final element that must be present in the attitude I must cultivate in the pursuit of sanctification is a personal commitment to prioritize my life so that I orient and direct my strength and energy to knowing, understanding, and obeying God's Word (v. 11). Assuming Daniel wrote these words, one can envision him surrounded by the trappings of wealth and power and exclaiming that He had chosen a different treasure. Rather than pursuing the wealth and wisdom of Babylon, he had treasured up God's Word in his inner man. The word "heart" in this text refers to more than the emotional quotient of man. It involves his reason and mind. Daniel was expressing more than just an emotional feeling toward God's Word, although that was certainly present in his heart. He was stressing that because he had come to see the abiding value of God's Word, he had determined to store up its specific statements in his mind so that when his decisions were shaped by reasoned thought, these thoughts would themselves have been shaped and influenced by what he had stored up – God's Word.

The reason this is so vital for all of God's people lies in the nature of the human heart. Our unaided thinking has a natural propensity to lead us to actions that "miss" (sin) the mark God has set. The way to avoid "sinning" or "missing the mark" in our daily living is to so shape our thinking by God's Word that when we make decisions, the actions that flow from those decisions are in accordance with what God has revealed about His ways and expectations in His Word.

The application of all of this to our life is simple. In order to please God we must strive to be like God. This requires that we know what God is like. This can only happen if we spend time in the Word where God has revealed what He is like. Any serious pursuit of this agenda that goes beyond mere lip service will involve an aggressive commitment to the regular and repeated reading of the Bible. Furthermore, this commitment goes beyond repeated reading to the pursuit of personal understanding. This means that any serious commitment to personal sanctification will require the diligent, careful, accurate study of Scripture. It also requires extended personal contemplation or meditation on what one has discovered in God's Word. Verse eleven of this text sets forth the requirement of actually memorizing the words in God's Word exactly so that they become intuitive responses that will help us avoid sinning.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Staying Obedient and Faithful in Tough Times

Stanza 3 – Verses 17-24

Deal bountifully with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your word.¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.¹⁹ I am a stranger in the earth; Do not hide Your commandments from me.²⁰ My soul breaks with longing For Your judgments at all times.²¹ You rebuke the proud -- the cursed, Who stray from Your commandments.²² Remove from me reproach and contempt, For I have kept Your testimonies.²³ Princes also sit and speak against me, But Your servant meditates on Your statutes.²⁴ Your testimonies also are my delight And my counselors.

In this edition of “Truth Talk” we continue our study of Psalm 119 by looking at the third stanza. The first stanza (vv. 1-8) stresses the priority of personal obedience of God’s word as the foundation for living a life that pleases God. The psalmist further develops this truth in the second stanza (vv. 9-16) by revealing that such obedience will require both an attitude that desires to know God’s Word as well as an aptitude to diligently retain and obey the instruction contained therein. In other words, the first stanza speaks of the blessing that comes to a person who is determined to live in wholehearted obedience to God’s Word and the second stanza reveals that the best time to begin this lifelong pursuit is when one is young.

In the third stanza (vv 17-24) we are, for the first time in this psalm, introduced to the reality that trials and afflictions will be the expected lot of one who chooses the path introduced in the first two stanzas. This has always been the difficulty for believers in any dispensation. We have been so accustomed to thinking that the blessing promised to those who live in accordance with God’s Word necessarily involves ease, comfort, and prosperity when in fact the opposite is true. While it is an assured promise from God’s Word that the man who seeks God and commits to His Word will be blessed, that blessing does not at all preclude trial and affliction. This stanza demonstrates that the psalmist who so passionately exhorts his readers to pursue God through His Word is not exception. Yet, even in the midst of the affliction and trial, the psalmist reveals that the path to blessing and bountiful life is found in a continued obedience and dedication to God’s Word rather than to the natural responses arising in one’s heart at such times and under such circumstances. And, in the midst of his deep affliction, the psalmist lifts his voice to God and prays.

This stanza naturally divides into two sections each reflecting a specific petition of the psalmists prayer as he endures extreme affliction and persecution. In the first half of the stanza (vv. 17-21) the psalmist prays for relief in the face of the spiritual apathy of his enemies. In the second half (vv. 22-24) he prays for respect in spite of the slander against him by his enemies. If our contention regarding Daniel’s authorship is correct than the context for this stanza presents itself easily to our imagination. It is not hard to imagine Daniel, knowing that the Chaldean counselors were plotting his demise and speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, committing himself afresh to his continual practice of seeking out God’s Words and making them his own counselors! And if we are at all correct in this surmising, Daniel’s triumph over the lions (those in the den as well as those in the court) is a comforting reminder that there is indeed bountiful life for those who choose to follow the path established

by God's Word rather than leaning to their own understandings when confronted with fierce opposition and strong affliction.

Prayer for Relief in the Face of Spiritual Apathy (vv. 17-21)

The psalmist's passion is expressed immediately in his plea for God's bountiful provision (v. 17). The term used indicates that the psalmist is not looking for mere deliverance or even for physical provision in the midst of adversity. Rather, he is asking God to give him richness and fullness in life. Obviously, if this is Daniel, he was living in the midst of opulence and was personally enjoying wealth and provision from his favored position as Nebuchadnezzar's counselor. Clearly, Daniel reminds the believer that no matter how favorable his earthly position in life might be, he is still an outcast, an alien, and a stranger on earth (v. 19). The proof of this comes in the attitude and actions exhibited toward God's servant by those around him who have determined to oppose God and who have chosen to disregard His commandments (v. 21). These men are described as proud, presumptuous, rebels against God. And their hatred and rejection of God Who is in heaven is directed to those who serve Him on earth.

Their pride has resulted in an aggressive apathy that manifests itself in a total disinterest and disregard of anything God has commanded or ordained as pleasing to Him. In contrast, the psalmist aligns himself with God and acknowledges that true bountiful living comes solely as a result of obedience to His Word. Interestingly, he begins by asking God for this bountiful spiritual life but the reason he wants this bounty is not to enjoy life but rather to more effectively live in obedience to God's Word (v. 17). It is as though the psalmist is asking for more life in order to render more obedience to God. In other words, his desire for more abundance is to render more abundant obedience. And it is not surprising that God delights to honor requests given with this motivation. However, his desire for abundant life in order to render more abundant obedience is impossible apart from Divine illumination (v. 18). So, he prays that God would "open" his eyes to see more of God's wondrous Word. The term here for "open" is the same one used in the account where God opened the eyes of rebellious Balaam so that he could see the angel standing before him on the path. It speaks not so much of an inability to see but rather of a removal of a covering or a veil. Daniel is acknowledging that in spite of his tremendous learning and academic skill, he is powerless to see and understand God's Word apart from God's enablement.

This illumination is especially necessary because his true position on earth is that of a stranger or an alien. While he is living on the earth and in the context of a fallen culture and society, there is a sense in which he, as a child of God, is completely alien to that culture and society. He cannot find direction for life from the same sources those around him are drawing direction from. Nor does he desire direction from those sources. Rather, his soul is crushed and internally broken by his desperate longing for direction from God's commandments and judgments. Only here in God's Word will he find the relief that he so desperately desires when confronted by those whose lives are lived in total apathy and outright rebellion against his God.

Prayer for Respect in the Face of Slander from Enemies (vv. 21-24)

In this section of the stanza, the psalmist calls attention to his enemies by identifying who they are, what they are like, and what they do. These people are clearly in positions of power and influence and therefore have the ability to directly impact his life in grave ways. The psalmist however comforts himself by remembering that God, Who is mightier than his enemies, has cursed such ones (v. 21). After coming before God and reviewing what his enemies are doing against him, the psalmist appeals that God would "roll" away the heavy burden of their scorn and contempt. And as he does so, he does not hesitate to remind God that in contrast to the rebellion and arrogance of his opponents, he has kept God's reminders before his eyes and guided his path by their testimony (v. 22).

In a powerful statement, the psalmist reveals that his response to affliction and persecution is governed by a deliberate and careful study of God's ordinances, particularly

those associated with what God required for worship and access (statutes in v. 23). No personal vendetta or revenge wrongfully taken was worth losing this access to God in worship.

Finally, the psalmist contrasts the wicked counselors who everywhere attacked him with the counselors who were always with him and who were for him not against him. These counselors were God's testimonies or His works and words. These counselors are always available and their counsel is unerringly accurate and faithful. And in following them, Daniel found life and favor before both the King of Heaven and the earthly monarch he served and at times suffered under.

So it will always be for God's faithful servants. If we are truly living in the way of Heaven we are going to be necessarily strangers and aliens on earth and we can expect to be treated correspondingly. When we suffer unfairly and we need relief from the pressures that come because we are aliens, we must turn to God and continue to lay hold on His Word. When we desperately desire respect we must seek it first from God and only then will we be in a place to receive it from men in due time. In either case, believers must commit themselves afresh to keeping the Word of God as the reason for wanting more life and this will only happen when God opens our eyes and causes us to see that the wonders in His Word far surpass any earthly delight. Then, and only then, will we desire to live for the right reason. May this be our prayer in the days ahead.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Staying Obedient and Faithful in Spite of Sinful Inclination

Stanza 4 – Verses 25-32

My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word. ²⁶ I have declared my ways, and You answered me; Teach me Your statutes. ²⁷ Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works. ²⁸ My soul melts from heaviness; Strengthen me according to Your word. ²⁹ Remove from me the way of lying, And grant me Your law graciously. ³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. ³¹ I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! ³² I will run the course of Your commandments, For You shall enlarge my heart.

In this edition of “Truth Talk” we continue our study of Psalm 119 by looking at the fourth stanza. The first stanza (vv. 1-8) stressed the priority of personal obedience of God’s word as the foundation for living a life that pleases God. The psalmist further developed this truth in the second stanza (vv. 9-16) by revealing that such obedience requires an attitude that desires to know God’s Word as well as an aptitude to diligently retain and obey the instruction contained therein. The third stanza (vv. 17-24) revealed this kind of life will encounter strong resistance from those who opposed God and His Word.

While it is an assured promise from God’s Word that the man who seeks God and commits to His Word will be blessed, that blessing does not at all preclude trial and affliction. This stanza demonstrates that the psalmist who so passionately exhorts his readers to pursue God through His Word is not exception. Yet, even in the midst of the affliction and trial, the psalmist reveals that the path to blessing and bountiful life is found in a continued obedience and dedication to God’s Word rather than to the natural responses arising in one’s heart at such times and under such circumstances.

The fourth stanza reveals yet another obstacle standing in the way of the man who chooses to walk the path of righteousness—his own sinful inclination. Whereas in the third stanza the opposition was external, here in this stanza the psalmist is confronted by an internal opponent, his sin nature. The terms he uses and the intensity with which he expresses his anguish (vv. 25, 28) all point to his realization that his worthy aspiration has been assailed by sinful failure on his part. Yet, even in abject humiliation and deep soul anguish, the psalmist refuses to give up his quest. In his brokenness he cries out to God for aid, and with confidence borne out of past experience, he sets out on the path with renewed resolve anticipating both forgiveness and enabling grace so that he might run where he once was content to walk—in the way of God’s commandments.

This stanza divides naturally into two sections, each introduced by a question born out of failure and desperation. In the first section, the Psalmist expresses his humiliation (v. 25), and in the second he cries out in the agony produced by his humiliation (v. 28). Not only has he found the path he has chosen to be difficult, he has failed in some unstated way and departed from the “way.” A mark of a true believer is how he feels about his sinful failure. Often it is easy to excuse failure and sin precisely because it is hard to walk the path of righteousness and stay righteous. This is especially true when faced with affliction and scorn on every side. However, for a man to be blessed, he must deal with even his own failures in a righteous way—by taking them to God rather than covering them, excusing them, or ignoring them.

I. Help When Facing the Humiliation of Failure (vv. 25-27)

The psalmist acknowledges his deep humiliation and repentance in an unforgettable image—“my soul cleaves to the dust” (v. 25). Later in this stanza will cleave to God’s testimonies (v. 2), but here the image is that of a person prostrated on the ground with his entire body and face pressed hard into the dust. Clearly he has been brought low by his failure and he has bowed low in submission to God. Interestingly, he does not mention his sin or the point of his failure. Reading through Daniel there is no mention of failure or sin ascribed to the prophet. This does not mean Daniel had no sin, clearly as a sinner, he did struggle as do all men. However, perhaps we should consider that what may have appeared to be a very slight infraction to others, not even worthy of mention, to a man desiring to seek God and obey him from the heart – even a slight sin is a serious offence against God and not to be passed over lightly.

How often have you come to God with some sin or failure and treated it as a minor matter hardly worth mentioning. Charles Bridges in his famous commentary on Psalm 119 made this observation: “Men often make this same confession but there is no ‘striving’ – not humiliation, no prayer, no faith in God’s Word. Rather, we are almost glad to admit our state with no real desire to exert ourselves to avail the single necessary cure! We will not get better by mere mourning over our sin or our deadness. Our indisposition to our spiritual duty is not a weakness . . . it is a sin to be confessed and abandoned. So, sift the character of your confession. Is it a habitual, persevering overcoming conflict with sin? Or do you engage in fruitless bemoaning of your state when you would be better served by exercising yourself to come to God’s Word to obey what you find therein?”

The Psalmist was not content with such meager repenting, instead he cries out to God for reviving (v. 25). The term he utilized expresses more than just a desire to live and survive. It expresses the desire to live a full and blessed life – the kind of blessed life he observed in stanza to which he himself had aspired! Further, he is under no misconception as to what will bring life to his fallen state. He will be enlivened by God but it will be according to God’s Word. Again, the psalmist points to the centrality of God’s Word for living that pleases God. Earlier, he noted that the Word could cleanse a man from sin – now he stands in need of that cleansing and he comes confidently to God seeking it for himself.

His confidence stems from past experience. He has recounted his “ways” to God in the past, and God has answered him (v. 26). The idea of coming to God with “words” when one has sinned is an important biblical principle. Hosea instructs God’s sinning people to return to Him and to take “words” with them as they went (Hosea 14:1-2). However, mere words were not enough. These people had come once before with “words” and were met with silence from God (Hosea 6:1-3). Words had to come from a heart broken over sin and humbled before God. Those words would be heard and the psalmist gives personal testimony of God’s faithfulness to forgive him in the past (v. 26).

His past experience with God has given him the confidence to come again in this present time of need. And, he is bold to pray for instruction in the thing that will give him life and vigor again – God’s statutes (v. 26). Specifically he is asking God to for present help in understanding and embracing the ethical demands of the way of God’s precepts. The term “precepts” speaks of God’s orders or expectations. The psalmist has departed from the way prescribed by these orders and is now desiring divine assistance in returning to that path and remaining on it. He is asking for more than just intellectual understanding. He is asking God to give him internal, ethical insight into what pleases God. This insight belongs exclusively to God Who can choose to reveal it or to hide it from men (Isaiah 29:14). Recognizing his need of Divine assistance, the Psalmist cries out for God to teach him and to make him understand the right way. He is confident that the result of God doing this for him will be a continual meditation on God’s wonders.

God’s past faithfulness emboldened him to come in his present need and ask for the very thing he needed to continue his walk in the path of the righteous – a return to obeying

God's Word produced by a renewed enablement to delight in and meditate on the Law of the Lord.

II. Comfort When Facing the Anguish of Failure (vv. 28-32)

Not only was the Psalmist humiliated by his failure, he was deeply grieved. He expresses his grief as though his soul were melting away in tears (v. 28). Earlier in the stanza he asked the Lord to revive him; here he asks God to strengthen him. What is the solution for a soul being crushed by grief over sin? God's strength and support. And like the reviving (v. 25), this strength and support is also from God's Word (v. 28).

But the psalmist wants something specific from God. He wants to be delivered or turned away from a "way" or path – the false path, the way of lying/falsehood (v. 29). Instead, he desires that God would grant him His law. In other words, the psalmist wanted God to turn him away from the path of lying by causing him to obey His law. Again, deliverance from sin is found only in obeying God's law and strength for such obeying comes only from God.

Again, the psalmist points to his past record as grounds for his present request. He has chosen the faithful way and he has placed God's ordinances before him (v. 30). The idea expressed here is that of an carefully thought-out choice based on full agreement to God's righteous rules. His present request is that God would not allow him to come to shame because of a refusal on God's part to act on his behalf in answer to his prayer for revival and strength according to God's Word.

This present request is accompanied by more than the record of a past choosing on his part to obey God. It is accompanied by a present commitment to keep obeying. He describes his present commitment as "clinging" to God's testimonies. The idea expressed by "cling" is to conform to, to hold on to something – in this case, God's testimonies. In the opening verse of this stanza he was "cleaving" to the dust, here he is cleaving just as hard to God's testimonies. And, in light of both his past record and his present commitment, he cries out, "Yaheweh! Help me!" "Don't let me come to shame!"

The reason he is desperate for God to intervene is found in his future desire to "run" in the way of God's commandments. In other words, the psalmist is making his case along these lines. "I have a present desire to "run" or to live my life according to your commandments. I have had a past record of doing so. That past record is grounded in both my choice to walk this path as well as my commitment to do so in spite of opposition and trouble. However, I have failed at some point in the journey and I am now humiliated and anguished by my failure. I am coming to you for help to continue walking—no, running—on the path. I can't do this unless you revive me and strengthen me. What I most need is for you to enlarge my heart (v. 32)."

What is an enlarged heart? It is simply increased capacity that comes from God to obey His commands with a whole heart! The New Testament reminds us we have not because we ask not. Although the Psalmist did not have that verse, he understood the concept and he did not fail to come to God in faith and ask. Nor should we!

We often desire to walk the path but are so easily derailed by opposition or by our own internal sinful inclination. The answer to both is the same – Divine assistance. But, that divine assistance comes from God's Word. Therefore we must ask, as the psalmist asked, for God to instruct us and to enable us to do His Word in our lives. In other words, we need to ask God to enlarge our heart's capacity to understand His word more so that we can obey Him more! May that be your prayer in the weeks ahead.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

The Secret to An Enlarged Heart for God

Stanza 5 – Verses 33-40

Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall keep it to the end. ³⁴ Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. ³⁵ Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. ³⁶ Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to covetousness. ³⁷ Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, And revive me in Your way. ³⁸ Establish Your word to Your servant, Who is devoted to fearing You. ³⁹ Turn away my reproach which I dread, For Your judgments are good. ⁴⁰ Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me in Your righteousness.

A helpful way to understand the message of this psalm is to see it as the psalmist's personal testimony of what he encountered in his attempt to walk in the path of God's righteous way. We have already noted that the central theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God. In fact, God's Word is described by eight different words occurring throughout the psalm, each of which directs attention to an important aspect, quality, or function the Bible has for the life and walk of an obedient believer.

However, a second important consideration to which the psalmist calls attention is the "way" or "path" prescribed by God for those who love Him. The Psalter opens with a psalm identifying the two specific "paths" set before every man. The choice a man makes regarding which path he will walk throughout his life will determine his direction in this life and his destiny in the next. This psalm (119) records the testimony of a man who has chosen the "way" or path that God said would lead to prosperity and eternal life. In other words, Psalm 119 is the personal record of a man who has chosen not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, not to stand in the way of sinners, and not to sit in the seat of the scornful (Psalm 1:1). Instead, he has determined to delight in the Law of the Lord (Torah) and to mediate therein throughout his entire life (Psalm 1:2). Consequently, he anticipates being successful and fruitful in his life before God (Psalm 1:3).

The first two stanzas of Psalm 119 record his observation that others who have walked in this way have been blessed for doing so (119:1-4). He has determined to join them on this path and has expressed this in a heartfelt cry in which he promises to praise Him out of a right heart (119:7) and to obey him out of an informed heart (119:7b-8). What will inform and instruct his heart in the "way" he has chosen is none other than the Word of God (119:9-16) which is his delight and whose words he intends to learn, memorize, and mediate on in order that he might keep them with all of his heart, in all of his ways, for all of his days.

However, as he embarks on the path with a heart strengthened by good intention, he quickly encounters strong derision and opposition from those who have chosen to walk the other "path" (119:17-24). In this third stanza he responds to oppression by adopting God's testimonies as his counselors to guide him in the way he should go.

The fourth stanza (119:25-32) reveals yet another obstacle standing in the way of his commitment to walk in God's way – his own sinful inclination. His soul is literally crushed

within him and brought low (119:25) when he measures his actual performance against the desires he has so courageously stated in the first two stanzas. But, as downcast as his soul might be, he refuses to remain “in the dust.” Nor does he attempt to stand in his own strength. Rather, he asks God to enlarge his heart in order that he might “run” in the path of God’s commandments (119:32).

His desire for God to enlarge his heart so he can walk obediently is directly dependent on his ability to understand God’s word. He can’t obey what he doesn’t know or understand so the fifth stanza (119:33-40) contains a series of specific petitions for enlightenment and empowerment to know and obey God’s Word.

The Nature of the Petitions

This stanza in the Psalmist’s acrostic is arranged under the letter “he.” In the Hebrew alphabet this letter is often used to alert the reader to verbs that are causative in nature. A causative verb is one in which something or someone is caused to do an action. One of the easiest ways to understand this concept is to observe the language the psalmist uses in this stanza where he asks God to cause him to do or experience something. Each of his petitions can be expressed and introduced with this formula: “Make me to . . .” Make me to learn the way of your statutes (32). Make me to understand (34). Make me to march in the path of your commandments (35). Make my heart desire your testimonies (36). Make my eyes turn away from looking at vanity (37). Make good your promises to me (38). Make my reproach depart from me (39).

Clearly, the psalmist recognizes his need for the things he is asking God to give him. But in asking for them in this way, he is stressing his inability to gain any of these necessary things in his own strength. In other words, it is not merely reading the Bible more that will give him what he lacks. Nothing short of God teaching and causing him to understand will allow him to stay on the right path to the end.

When we pray these petitions for ourselves, we must also come to this same conclusion. These kinds of prayers are prayed by people who have come to the end of themselves. Those who have found themselves “in the dust” in spite of their best efforts and their determination to “live for God” are in the perfect position to look up to God and pray these same requests that God would do for them what they can’t do on their own.

The Goal of the Petitions

The first two verses of this stanza reveal the psalmist’s goal or desire in praying for God to enlighten him. He wants this understanding in order that he might walk in the path to the end (119:33). His reason for asking is wrapped up in his desire for a renewed commitment to walking in the way of God’s righteous statutes. And, he wants to walk in this way to the very end of his life.

He also desires enlightenment in the righteous law of God, the Torah, so that his obedience will come out of a right heart attitude (119:34) and that it not be merely external obedience forced from a heart internally directed to the other path. He wants to obey God with all of his heart, in all of his ways, and for all of his days. However, in order for this to truly happen in him, God is going to have to cause it to come about. And with this in mind, he sets out to beseech God for specific things that are necessary for life-long, wholehearted obedience.

The Content of the Petitions

The verses that make up this stanza contain seven specific requests that can be summed up in the concept of enablement. He has articulated his desire to walk in this way earlier in the psalm. He has also encountered difficulty and even failure in spite of his best and most determined intentions to walk blamelessly in this way. In “the dust” of personal

failure, his need for divine enablement has become painfully clear. But what is it that will actually enable him to walk the path successfully? What exactly does he need God to enable him to do? This enablement comes in the form of seven distinct things the psalmist asks God to do for him.

First, he needs God's instruction (119:33). He needs God to make him learn the way of His statutes – His permanent and abiding spiritual laws. The term "teach" is the word from which the term "torah" is derived. It depicts God's Word as divine instruction and the psalmist is recognizing it as such. He is also acknowledging that he needs more than mental or cognitive understanding of the terms and concepts contained therein. He needs something that only God can give – he needs Divine instruction so that he is made to understand the direction God wants his life to take. And his stated goal in wanting this instruction is that he might observe or live out his life accordingly.

Not only does he need Divine instruction, he needs illumination (119:34). The term "understanding" points to the idea of discernment or perception. He has no hope of obeying instruction apart from illumination or discernment about that instruction. This request reveals an important point in walking consistently in the path. It is not enough to give rote or wooden obedience to the statements of Scripture. Such obedience will never suffice to live obediently under all the diverse circumstances that arise in life. Rather, one must know the purpose, intent, and direction of the statements in Scripture in order to keep the spirit of the law as well as the letter. And, in order to be able to discern how to live biblically in situations not specifically addressed in Scripture, one needs understanding or illumination from God. Interestingly, the reason for this request is precisely that he might give careful attention and wholehearted obedience to God's divine instruction. He is not at all content to just know enough to obey in order to be able to say he obeyed. He is not wanting to get away with something simply because God has not specifically prohibited or mandated it. Rather, he is asking God to cause him to understand His instruction so that he will know how to obey in every circumstance he encounters on the path of righteousness.

His third petition is for Divine motivation (35). He has chosen to make God's law his delight (Psalm 1:2) and now he is asking God to cause him to march in accordance and obedience to the specific commandments in that Law. He is asking God to cause him to obey His divine will as it has been revealed in His divine commandments. And, the reason he wants God to make him walk in this way is his love for the way of righteousness. The thing he delights in is more than mere "law-keeping." It is the pathway itself that occupies his favor. He has observed that those who walk in this path have been blessed and so he is favorably inclined to this way of life. His favorable inclination stands behind his petition for God to make him walk in accordance with His commandments.

Fourth, the psalmist pleads for right heart inclination (36). He knows only too well the nature and bent of his heart toward foolish and worthless things. God must actively turn or bend his heart in a new direction. God must turn his heart away from worthlessness and to that which has eternal worth – His testimonies!

Since a man's heart is affected by what his eyes behold (Job 31:7; Proverbs 15:30), the psalmist's fifth petition is for divine redirection of his vision (119:37). He asks God to direct his eyes away from vanity and worthlessness. It is quite possible that the reason he finds himself off the path he has chosen and in the dust of failure is precisely because his eyes were diverted by the glitter of some worthless pleasure or temptation. As he reflects on how he arrived at his painful condition, he asks God to redirect his vision to things that are weighty and worthwhile; namely, God's path. And, he asks God to quicken him and to cause him to "live" in His way.

Because he is going against the strong inclination produced by what his eyes see on every hand, the psalmist next asks God for confirmation of all that He has promised in His Word (119:38). The term "establish" means in this context to confirm something that God has said or promised. To paraphrase the psalmist, "When my eyes consider something that

seems to contradict something You have said, Lord confirm that what you have said or promised is indeed so.” The psalmist asks for this confirmation because he understands the importance of relying confidently in God’s statements because they are the source of the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. This fear is essential in the believer’s sanctification. Contemporary Christendom has downplayed the importance of a biblical fear of the Lord and replaced it with an overly casual approach to God. However, not only is the fear of the Lord the beginning of true wisdom, it is the source of spiritual health and growth (Acts 9:31; Romans 11:20-21; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:17).

The final petition is one for vindication (119:39). He asks God to remove or avert the reproach that has come upon him. This reproach is either the scorn heaped upon him by those on the other path who oppose him or it is the reproach of his failure to live up to his decision to walk the path of righteousness successfully. In either case, he realizes that such reproach will not go away merely through new declarations about his future intentions or even by his diligent efforts to get back on the path. God Himself must vindicate him and this will come only when God removes the reproach that is upon him. It is quite possible that the reproach he speaks of is somehow associated to his obedience rather than his failure simply because he hastens to avow the goodness of God’s rules or judgments. If he is speaking of this reproach as the divine consequences he has experienced for disobedience, then he is asking God to remove them after God has answered his prayer for enlightenment and empowerment. If, on the other hand, he is speaking of the reproach he has experienced for choosing to walk the path of righteousness, then he is asking God to remove vindicate him and he is acknowledging that he is being reproached for a good or righteous thing – God’s judgments.

The Ground of the Petitions

The final verse in this stanza does not begin with a strong causative petition but rather with a loud affirmation. The psalmist calls God’s attention to something which is in fact the ground for all of his previous petitions – “Behold, I long for your precepts!” (119:40). The reason he wants God to enlighten (by means of instruction and understanding) and empower him to keep God’s statutes and Law is that he longs after God’s precepts just as a loyal subordinate longs to obey the instructions and commandments of a beloved superior. He is pointing to his loyal love for God and he is expressing that loyal love as a longing to obey God’s instruction and to meet God’s expectations.

However, even in this praiseworthy longing, the psalmist recognizes his total inability to fulfill his heart’s desire. He acknowledges that he is at best an unprofitable servant. However, he can be profitable; he can be obedient; he can meet God’s righteous expectations if God will give him strength and life to do so. Hence, he ends this stanza with one final plea – “Revive me by your righteousness!”

As it was for the psalmist, so it is for every true believer who desires to live a life that consistently pleases God and conforms to His Word. We can’t do so in our own righteousness. Our only hope is that He would give us strength and life and that comes from His limitless and boundless righteousness which He has freely given to us in Christ without measure. Therefore, there is no reason to remain in the dust of our failure. Rather, let us call out with the psalmist for God to revive us and when He has done so, let us dust off our failure and set out on the path afresh, strengthened with a strength that is not our own!

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Resolved: To Live for God by His Strength and Not My Own

Stanza 6 – Verses 41-48

(Part 2)

Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD -- Your salvation according to Your word.⁴² So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me, For I trust in Your word.⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, For I have hoped in Your ordinances.⁴⁴ So shall I keep Your law continually, Forever and ever.⁴⁵ And I will walk at liberty, For I seek Your precepts.⁴⁶ I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, And will not be ashamed.⁴⁷ And I will delight myself in Your commandments, Which I love.⁴⁸ My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.

In the previous edition of *Truth Talk* we noted that this sixth stanza contains two passionate pleas from the Psalmist in which he beseeches God for grace to declare God's truth confidently (vv. 41-42) and credibly (vv. 42-48) in the face of strong opposition. Our focus was narrowed to the first of those petitions, a plea for grace to declare God's truth confidently.

We discovered that this plea, though articulated in desperate circumstances, sprang from a heart confident in God's Word and resting on God's promise. And this confidence anticipated a deliverance sourced in or "according to" God's Word. In other words, as the Psalmist considered his dire circumstance he recognized the solution was in God's Word. And in this Word from God he found "words" of his own with which to answer his oppressors. Consequently he reaffirmed his confident reliance on the divinely inspired Word that revealed to him God's reliability and faithfulness in the performance of His Own Word.

After pleading with God for grace to declare God's Word confidently in the midst of his oppressors, the Psalmist's unshakable confidence in God's promise led him to express a second plea – one for credibility in life as he declared God's truth before His oppressors (vv. 43-48).

II. A Plea for Grace to Declare God's Truth Credibly (vv. 43-48)

The Psalmist prayed that God's Word would not be taken from him as he answers the "words" against him with a "word" from God's Word. The implication of this petition is that God's Word might be removed from him through a loss of credibility by some act of disobedience or faithlessness on his part. Hence his commitment to "wait on" or to do and obey God's commandments or "ordinances" (v. 43). Again, this isn't a desperate plea coming from a heart of doubt. The phrase, "I wait" is parallel to his earlier declaration of trusting in God's Word. It highlights the Psalmist's confident expectation that God will fulfill all of His righteous judgments and that when God does so, he will find relief.

This confidence in God's fulfillment of what He has ordained led the Psalmist to do more than merely affirm God's faithfulness. Confidence in God's faithfulness prompted faithful behavior in the Psalmist (v. 44)! And the first and foremost expression of this faithful behavior was his lifelong commitment to consistently obey God's Word (v. 44). As he

“waited” confidently on God’s judgments this produced in him a spiritual consistency marked by a lifelong pattern of spiritual obedience.

But what was the result of such lifelong obedience? Freedom in life – both in walk (v. 45) and witness (v. 46)! Paradoxically, the restraint the Psalmist exercised in being governed by obedience to God’s Word brought about liberty and unrestrained freedom in his walk with God as well as in his witness for God. Therefore, it is not surprising that he committed himself afresh to living within the constraints of God’s precepts (v. 45). Without question submission to the “orders” of a superior, in this case God, is in view. In fact, obedience to these orders or “precepts” from God became his lifelong preoccupation.

The fruit of this preoccupation was more than just a freedom in his life and walk with God but also a freedom and boldness to declare God’s Word to anyone anywhere, even to the king (v. 46). Again, if Daniel is the author, we can see how this unfolded. His submission to God’s Word constantly and continuously was the occasion used against him by the wicked words of his oppressors. But, a Word from God shut the mouth of the lions and set Daniel at liberty with a “word” by which to answer his oppressors. He walked confidently and credibly before God and consequently, God gave Daniel great liberty to speak God’s Word to the king! And he did so without fear of failure – either on his part or on the Lord’s to live up to God’s Word.

Such unfettered freedom and such bold and assured confidence led the Psalmist to deep inner personal life satisfaction and worthy worship (v. 47-48). The Word of God which produced this freedom became his chief delight. The commandments of God and their ensuing obligations were not burdensome to him; they were his delight! Therefore, he longed for more of God’s Word. The image of “stretching out hands” is one of reaching out in longing to grasp more of something (v. 48).

This longing naturally drove the Psalmist to mediate more thoroughly over God’s commandments and to value God’s statutes more ardently (v. 48). This preoccupation with God’s Word had life shaping implications. How would his life have the credibility necessary to declare God’s Word boldly? Such credibility would come as his life was shaped by and conformed to God’s Word.

So this section is really about how a man of God can live more confidently and freely for God in the midst of very aggressive and antagonistic enemies. Only by God’s grace can he survive and thrive! Only in God’s Word will he find a timely and right response. Only as his life is shaped by and conformed to God’s Word will his “word” be validated.

If we are to experience the freedom and liberty of soul and life described here, we will have to turn to the same source as did the Psalmist and we will have to embrace a similar commitment to lifelong personal obedience rendered joyfully to God from a heart that delights in His Word!

And what will make such living delightful is both a deep love for God who gave this Word and a personal experiencing of the freedom, boldness, and spiritual satisfaction that comes from such obedience! May the Lord give us this kind of heart for His Word!

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Remember to Remember!

Stanza 7 – Verses 49-56

Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. ⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life. ⁵¹ The proud have me in great derision, Yet I do not turn aside from Your law. ⁵² I remembered Your judgments of old, O LORD, And have comforted myself. ⁵³ Indignation has taken hold of me Because of the wicked, who forsake Your law. ⁵⁴ Your statutes have been my songs In the house of my pilgrimage. ⁵⁵ I remember Your name in the night, O LORD, And I keep Your law. ⁵⁶ This has become mine, Because I kept Your precepts.

In the previous stanza the psalmist assured the reader that it is possible to live confidently and consistently before the Lord in the face of external opposition and in spite of a believer's own internal inconsistency. This perseverance is possible because of the enablement God gives to those who humbly petition for strength and life to obey His Law and to walk in the way of the Word!

Every believer will need this assurance at some point in his attempt to keep his commitment to walk in the way of the Word. As you recall, the psalmist is chronicling what he experienced as he set out to walk in this way. In the first stanza, he saw the blessing of God upon the lives of certain men and determined to discover what caused God to bless them. He learned that these men were blessed because of their commitment to observe and obey the Law of the Lord. And, in light of their example, he determined to join them on this path.

The secret to walking the path of divine blessing is revealed in the second stanza of the psalm. These verses identify that secret as knowing and doing God's Word. In staying on the path and not departing to the right hand or to the left, the man of God is assured of success (Joshua 1:8).

However, as the psalmist sets out to follow the path marked out in God's Word, he quickly discovers that this kind of committed walking is easier said than done. Very quickly he encounters major impediments standing in the way of his walk before the Lord. First, in stanza three he encounters opposition and resistance from those walking on the other path – the broad path that leads to spiritual destruction (Matthew 7:13). God's statutes become the object of his mediation and consequently, God's testimonies about life, circumstances, and men become the "counselors" that guide his steps in the way.

The second impediment he encounters is his own spiritual inconsistency. The fourth stanza opens with the man of God knocked off his feet and lying in the dust. He has stumbled and fallen from the path and is desperately crying out for divine aid. He has learned in the bitter dust of his own failure that he cannot walk the path consistently in his own strength. He needs God's power. And this strength comes as a response to his prayer in stanza five where he beseeches God for instruction, illumination, and enablement. He has attempted to walk the path and failed. But even in the dust, he remembers that there were men who managed to walk the path successfully and so he cries out for God to revive his strength. His prayer

comprises the eight verses that make up the fifth stanza and his anticipation of God's response is found in the sixth stanza.

But, what will keep the psalmist from slipping in the future? How will God enable him to live confidently and consistently in the face of future opposition or in view of his own spiritual inconsistency? The answer to this question is of utmost importance to anyone who is serious about living for God and walking in the way of His Word. And that answer is the subject of the eight verses that make up the seventh stanza of this psalm. Once again, the answer is wrapped up in God's Word. By observing God's precepts, the psalmist makes them his own (v. 56) and by so doing experiences a reviving of strength, vitality, and spiritual life (v. 50). In short, the psalmist confidently asks God to remember His word to His servant (v. 49) because His servant has remembered God's judgments (v. 52) and His name (v. 55).

This stanza is themed around the concept of remembering. God is called upon to remember and to act in faithful fulfillment of what He has said in His Word. The psalmist points to his own faithful remembrance of God's Word as well as his present remembering of God's character as the ground for this appeal.

Many times believers find themselves in the same difficult situation as the psalmist but lack the confidence to ask Him to remember His Word to them because they have not been living in ways that reflect a remembrance of Him on their part. Sadly, this is often the case with those who have been given the greatest opportunity to avail themselves of God's Word. Pastors can give ample testimony of members in their flock who have made shipwreck of their lives, their marriages, and their ministry because in the midst of their crisis they have refused to "remember" what God has instructed in His Word. Consequently, they live out their lives in the dust of their own failure never experiencing the blessing that comes upon the life of those who, like the psalmist, experience the blessing of being "remembered" by God because they have set themselves to "remember" Him. Sadly, many of these believers have spent years sitting under the sound teaching of God's Word in churches, Christian schools, or Bible colleges and Christian Universities.

Interestingly, the psalmist observes that God has in some way "caused" him to hope or to be confident in God's Word. How did God bring about this confidence and under what circumstances?

I. The Ground of a Believer's Confidence (vv. 49-50)

The Hebrew term "remember" (*zakar*) means much more than to recall something to mind. This is especially true when one considers that the psalmist is asking an omniscient God to "remember." Remembering is more than a function of memory. In the context of biblical literature, "forgetting" and "remembering" have to do with the way a person chooses to act. One can "forget" God's Word in the midst of quoting portions of it by memory. We forget God's Word by refusing to act in conformity to its demands or by rejecting its authority to govern our responses in the circumstances of life. In the same way, "remembering" God's Word is to act in ways that meet His expectations – in other words, to obey.

In verse 49, the psalmist beseeches God to remember His Word. The term "word" used here is further defined in the next verse as the "promise" which has given him life. In other words, the psalmist is asking God to act in accordance with what He has said in the past by fulfilling the commitments and promises He has made to His people. The confident assurance that God will act consistently with His character as it has been revealed in His Word has comforted the psalmist's heart and "revived" his soul in the midst of difficult and dark days. This has always been the case for believers throughout the ages – our confidence is based on God's commitment to consistently fulfill whatever He has said. His Word once spoken is ever valid and thus functions as a source of strength, comfort, guidance, and hope for pilgrims walking the way of the Word.

II. The Formation of a Believer's Confidence (vv. 50-52)

The psalmist has cried out with a strong plea, expressed almost as a demand, asking God to act in accordance with His Word. He has gained life and comfort from his confidence that God will fulfill what He has promised. But how was this confidence formed in his heart? Interestingly, the psalmist states that God caused this confidence in him – a confidence so strong that he boldly petitioned God to “remember” His Own promises. So, how did God cause this confidence to well up in the psalmist's heart? The answer may surprise us. God often uses the very things we spend most of our energies attempting to avoid in order to produce in us an unshakeable confidence in him. The psalmist identifies affliction and adversity as two primary experiences God uses to drive His people to His Word so they may find strength to continue walking in the way of the Word.

Through Affliction (v. 50)

Often it is in the furnace of affliction that God applies the permanent glaze of confidence in Him to the clay of our lives. There are lessons that can only be learned in the furnace and the psalmist affirms this repeatedly in this psalm. For instance, he testifies that his multitude of affliction (v. 107) was good for him because through affliction he has come to learn the reliability of God's statutes (v. 71). He readily admits that chief among the benefits of much affliction is that it motivates one to stop straying from the path (v. 67). He notes that at times he has been overwhelmed by trouble and anguish but has found stability in the commandments of God (v. 143). He can confidently call upon God to sustain him in and deliver him from adversity because he has not rejected God's instruction (v. 153). Finally, at the end of the journey looking back on the experiences of his life, he reminds those who follow after him on the way of the Word that nothing will cause them to stumble if they love God's Word (v. 165).

How different is the experience of many contemporary believers. In times of suffering and affliction, many turn aside from the path because it leads through a period of suffering. Rather than walk the way God has instead, they lean to their own understanding and turn down a path whose end is death. On the other hand, many of God's people can attest to the sweet benefit that has become their permanent possession because they were willing to walk with God in the valley even when the path led through the furnace of affliction.

Charles Bridges expressed it well in his helpful commentary on this text when he observed,

One word of God, sealed to the heart, infuses more sensible relief, than then thousand words of men . . . This indeed was the end, for which the Scriptures were written; and such power of consolation have they sometimes administered to the afflicted saint, that tribulation has almost ceased to be a trial, and the retrospect has been the source of thankful recollection.

Through Adversity (v. 51)

However, the psalmist goes further and specifies the particular nature of the affliction he is experiencing as the adversity that comes because wicked and proud men have him in derision (v. 51).

The grammar of the text makes it clear that the psalmist was under constant and utter mocking and scorning from insolent and arrogant men who were thoroughly godless in their outlook and rebellious in their upward look (v. 157). Nor was their derision limited to mocking words. The nature of his appeals throughout the psalm indicates that at times his life was in danger. For instance, they have dug pits to ensnare him and they almost succeeded in bringing about his death (vv. 85-87). They are actively seeking ways to destroy him (v. 95) and his life is ever in danger (v. 109).

How quickly we are turned aside from the way by those who mock God and scorn His Word. We are warned not to listen to the counsel of the ungodly, nor to live in the way of sinners, and to reject the place of the scorers (Psalm 1:1-3). Yet often the allure of these kinds of people proves to be almost irresistible to many of God's people. Who can forget the life of Lot who, lured by the counsel of the ungodly, lived the lifestyle of the wicked and was led by scorers to sit in the squalid seat of those who reject God and mock His Word. Sadly, that is the lot of many contemporary believers. And to keep us from this seat, God often warns us by allowing us to see and experience the truth about these men through the adversity they bring against us! Jesus warned His followers that Satan was a liar and a murderer who wanted to kill and destroy them. He still hates the godly man and seeks to destroy his life by means of the adversity of ungodly men. However, if we will let Him, God can use this very adversity to cause us to cling more tightly to the path of obedience revealed in His Word!

And this loyal obedience in the face of adversity was the testimony of the psalmist when he affirmed his commitment to refuse to be diverted from the path set out in God's Word. One commentator put it this way: "In the pressure cooker of all such persecution, he maintained that he had not detoured from the LORD's roadmap for life." What kept him on the path? His intentional recollection of the decisions and judgments God handed down in the past (v. 52). In the face of the derision cast against him by proud scorers and arrogant mockers of God, he recalled the fate of such men in days prior to his own. Perhaps he recalled the fate of those who mocked Noah and were carried away in the devastating judgment God sent through the Flood. Or perhaps he recalled the fiery fate of those wicked men who set themselves against Lot and the angelic messengers. Or perhaps he recalled the affliction and vindication of Joseph. By recalling the just decisions handed down by an all-powerful God, the psalmist strengthened his own resolve to number himself among the righteous! Surely he would echo words that would be inspired hundreds of years after his own time by a fellow pilgrim on the same path who said, "*the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment*" (2 Peter 2:9).

III. The Manifestation of a Believer's Confidence (vv. 53-55)

How is a believer's confidence in God and commitment to the path manifested in daily living? What are the signs that a pilgrim has not lost his way in affliction or been turned aside from the path by adversity?

A Passionate Rejection of Ungodly Men and their Wickedness (v. 53)

The first manifestation of a pilgrim's confidence in God is his response to those who have set themselves against God and against those who have committed to walk obediently before Him. The terminology the psalmist employs is instructive. First, he describes his response as a burning fury that has been ignited in his soul. And the reason for his passionate fury is not what has been done against him but rather what has been done against God and His laws. The objects of his righteous indignation are men who he describes as criminals. Their crime was to forsake God's law. This provides a very interesting insight into the character of these men – they were not pagans who had never understood or possessed God's law. The term "forsake" implies that at one time they possessed this law and were themselves initially placed on the path. However, their arrogance and rebellious heart led them to reject God's instruction (law or "torah") for how He wanted men to walk. And this rejection was criminal in that it turned these men away from the way of God's Word to their own way, a path of wickedness. Sadly, this has been the fate of many pilgrims who started out on the right path but refused to part ways with those who were disobedient to the instruction God had given them. The testimony of Scripture is clear on this matter. Tolerance of disobedient pilgrims leads to acceptance of their counsel and before long, to a turning from the path to join them in their disobedient walk.

The psalmist leaves no question as to where his loyalty lies. He is seized with burning indignation for the right reason – God's Law has been violated. We are often filled

with indignation when we have been sinned against by another. But this was not true of the psalmist. He was angry in the right way and for the right reason. Clearly, he was an early example of a much later instruction from Paul who commanded us to “*be angry and do not sin . . . nor give place to the devil*” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

A Personal Rejoicing in God’s Word (v. 54)

Not only does the psalmist manifest confidence in God’s Word by his response to those who have disobeyed the Law God had given them, he manifests his confidence by a second response – a personal rejoicing in God’s Word. He is manifestly upset that God’s laws are being spurned but in the midst of this flagrant wickedness he has a priceless possession that delights his inner man. As a pilgrim in an alien land rejoices in the possessions he carries from his homeland, so the psalmist rejoices in the statutes of God as he sojourns in a faraway land.

In his fine work on this passage George Zemek observed that “these were not dirges or a repertoire of the blues . . . they were ‘songs of rejoicing.’ The child of God has at his disposal the Divine resources which allow him to praise even from the pits of persecution and peril.”

In an earlier song about the Scripture, the psalmist echoes this sentiment by exulting in the sweetness and preciousness of God’s Word when he cried out, “*more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is waned, and in keeping them there is great reward*” (Psalm 19:10-11).

A Present Remembering of God’s Ways (v. 55)

Not only has his confidence in God manifested itself in his response to those who transgress God’s laws and in his delight in God’s permanent and abiding statements or statutes, it is manifested in a third response – a present remembering of God’s character.

The psalmist observes his intentional practice of meditating on God’s name in the night when darkness falls and clouds his vision. It is then that he turns his thoughts to God’s character. The Hebrew concept of “name” has reference to the character of a person as it is expressed in word and deed. Having already expressed his commitment to remember God’s Words (v. 52), the psalmist now affirms his commitment to remember God’s ways that spring forth from His nature. What is God like? How does He act? What are His ways? What is acceptable before His sight? All of this and more were the subjects of the psalmist’s thoughts in the night.

The writer of Proverbs reminds his reader that *as a man thinks in his heart, so is he* (Proverbs 23:7). And here we are given insight into what the psalmist was thinking in his heart. This was not idle whiling away of the hours – the implication of the text is that this was the intentional focusing of his mind to reflect on what he knew from Scripture about the character and ways of God, whose path he was committed to walk.

And because he knew God intimately and understood His ways, he was committed to following God’s instruction in his daily walk. His meditation produced more than mere mental understanding, it produced a way of life. And remembering meant more than engaging memory, it meant engaging the will in order to produce obedient conduct on an daily basis no matter how difficult the path, how dark the way, or how strong the opposition. No matter what he encountered in the path, the psalmist’s meditation on God’s character resulted in him keeping God’s law even when he could not see the end. Truly his delight was in the law of the Lord and meditating on this law created a delight in and understanding of the Lord who gave the law. And as a consequence, his life was a fruitful, stable tree planted deep in the soil whose roots were watered daily by the Word. Thus he could say, “I keep your Law.”

IV. The Permanence of a Believer's Confidence (v. 56)

"This has become mine, because I kept your precepts!" This is an amazing statement summing up a passionate plea asking God to fulfill His Word to the psalmist (v. 49). But what exactly has become the psalmist's and how did he come to possess it? Of the many possible interpretations, perhaps the one that makes the best contextual sense is this – the psalmist has come to possess the ability to understand and obey God's Word on a daily basis. The result of his meditation on God's character resulted in an understanding and a keeping of God's instruction (torah). And this has become his permanent possession. In other words, the inconsistency that put him in the dust (v. 25) has been resolved and removed by God and the psalmist has been enabled by God to live a life of consistent spiritual obedience in conformity to God's Ways and in obedience to God's Word. And he can do this consistently in the face of affliction and adversity no matter how dark and difficult the path before him may appear.

But what produced this divine enablement from God? How did he receive such a wonderful boon from God? His answer is in the last phrase of the stanza – "because I kept Your precepts." In other words, faithful obedience to God's instructions when the way is hard and the path is dark is difficult. However, when a man trusts God's instructions and does them, his reward is that God enables him to obey even more consistently. In other words, God rewards obedience by enabling more obedience.

Perhaps this is why so many fall away from the path. The adversity and affliction God sends their way to drive them to His Word demands that they trust God implicitly and obey Him blindly. And when they do so, they find He is trustworthy and His Word is reliable and so they can move forward with increased agility and with greater surefootedness. And this comes as one remembers God's faithfulness in the past during the present crisis in order to move forward in the future. By the same token, doubting God today will lead to greater inability to obey God in the future. Small liberties and disobediences today result in devastating departures down the road of life.

Conclusion:

But why does God do this? Why does He delay His promise and put His pilgrims in a place where they must trust and obey and cry out to remind Him to "remember His Word to His servants?"

Though we will never answer this question fully to our satisfaction this side of heaven, we know that a delay on God's part is not due to weakness, forgetfulness, or disinterest on His part. There are reasons and certain passages provide partial insight as to why God delays the fulfillment and deliverance of His people. One such passage would doubtless have been familiar to the psalmist. Moses reminded the people to "*remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD*" (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

The Puritan preacher, Thomas Manton explained that God's delays are designed first, to try our faith to the utmost to see if we can and will trust God for things we cannot see. Second, to try our patience to see if we will obey God as children worthy of His promise . . . when it is hard and when we are weak. Finally, to test our love to see if we will hold fast to God when it seems he has abandoned or forgotten us.

Manton went on to remind his hearers that in such times, “believers may humbly challenge God upon His Word and seek the full performance of what He has promised.”

Perhaps the reason so many of us never see the full performance of what God has promised is our appalling unfamiliarity with the Word of God that reveals the God of the Word. Plainly put, God does not remember those who do not remember Him! And remembering God demands a passionate and persistent commitment to love, learn, and live out God’s will as revealed in His Word. And when we determine to do this, we will be able to say with the psalmist, “***This has become mine!***”

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

God is Great . . . God is Good!

Stanza 9– Verses 65-72

You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. ⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments. ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. ⁶⁸ You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes. ⁶⁹ The proud have forged a lie against me, But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. ⁷⁰ Their heart is as fat as grease, But I delight in Your law. ⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. ⁷² The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.

From childhood on we have known the familiar words of the meal-time prayer, “God is great, God is good, now we thank Him for this food.” Uttering those words over our food is one thing . . . believing those truths away from the table is quite another thing entirely. Especially when God puts the food of affliction and tribulation before us. At that point it seems impossible to be thankful. But, our difficulty goes much deeper than just our inability to thank God for the hard things in life. During such times, often we find ourselves questioning whether God is good.

For sixty-four verses we have followed the steps of the Psalmists as he walks the way of the Word. And we know where those steps have led him. He has given us access to the innermost parts of his life and made us privy to his private thoughts along the way. We watched him bear the burden of affliction and oppression. We found him in the dust of personal failure. We joined him in the house of pain while he ate the bread of sorrows and washed it down with the bitter wine of affliction. And in all of this he clung tenaciously to his vow to walk obediently in the way of God’s Word (vv. 5-8). Like Job, he has not charged God foolishly nor has he sinned with his lips.

By the ninth stanza, the Psalmist is well along the path – almost halfway through the testimony of his journey. And here is the substance of that testimony – “*You have dealt well with Your servant!*” This is the perspective of a seasoned pilgrim well acquainted with the difficulty of the path as well as its delights. And when he pauses to tell those who are considering starting down the path, he testifies that he has experienced “good” from the hand of a good God!

But how can this be true? Are these just brave words uttered from a heart of a plucky pilgrim who knows that God is good even though he has not personally experienced that goodness? Does he say this in an effort to avoid discouraging those pilgrims who are following him on the path? Or has he truly experienced “good” from God? The eight verses in this stanza are his personal testimony that God is not just great, He is good and does good things to His servants who choose the way of His Word!

I. His Praise and Petition (vv. 65-66)

You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. ⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments.

As the Psalmist pauses in the journey, he looks back over the path he has trod and exclaims, “Good you have done with your servant, Lord!” This might be awkward phrasing to our Gentile ear but it was a powerful affirmation of how the Psalmist viewed his journey. In this single word, the Psalmist not only affirms the truth he observed about those who walk in God’s way (vv 1-4), he praises the God who brings blessing on such men. And by his praise, he confirms that he has personally experienced such blessing from God.

Praise to the Lord. *You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word (v. 65).* In the opening statement of the stanza the Psalmist brings one word forward – “good!” He searched for a word to adequately describe the sum total of his experience from God in Whose way he walked and the word he came up with was “good.” This is the same word that God used when He looked back on all that He had done in six literal days in which the universe was created – “*Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*” (Gen 1:31)

The Psalmist testifies that God has done “good” to him and not evil (v. 65). He asks God to teach him “good” judgment or discernment (v. 66). He observes that it was “good” for him to be afflicted (v. 71). And he proclaims that God’s Law is “good” and desirable (v. 72). And sandwiched between these four observations, the Psalmist places the key to seeing life as “good.” God is good and all that He does is good (v. 68). So in light of what he knows about God, the Psalmist looks at all that he has experienced from the hand of God and declares, “God has been good with me.”

And, we should not miss an important part of his praise – “according to Thy Word!” This is how the Psalmist measures what is “good.” As we have seen, the majority of the stanzas thus far have included more than a little suffering and affliction. One might wonder how this pilgrim can call such events and circumstances “good.” But the psalmist is measuring his life and its circumstances by a different standard – God’s Word. And by that standard, he has come to view his life as “good.” In other words, when He measures his circumstances by the Word of God and evaluates them in that light, what appears to be misfortune to our eye is seen quite differently by his eye. How different our perspective of life and all its circumstances would be if we would view it through the lens of God’s Word.

We should also note that the Psalmist does not qualify his statement in any way. He looks at his life, in all of its circumstances and through all of its experiences, and exclaims – “You have been good to Your Servant!” How did the psalmist develop such a powerful perspective about life? And more importantly, how can we who follow after him in the path develop such a perspective? The answer lies in his petition to the Lord.

Petition of the Lord. *Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments (v. 66).* The Psalmist is not making a new request. He has consistently requested instruction from the Lord throughout his journey. But there is an interesting development to his request in this verse. Normally his request for instruction is followed by a statement that indicates what he desires to be instructed in by the Lord. Usually he asks the Lord to teach him His statutes (v.11, 26, 64, 68, 124, 135, 17), judgments (v. 108), or ways (v. 33). In other words, normally the Psalmist is asking God for knowledge and insight about His Word. However here the Psalmist asks God to teach him good judgment and knowledge. The term judgment refers to discernment and knowledge speaks to perspective or perception. In other words, the Psalmist is asking God to teach him how to use the knowledge he has gained from God’s word in daily living. In other words, he wants God to do more than just give him understanding. He wants more than just mere information however accurate, important, and necessary that information about God’s Word might be. He wants the Lord to teach him to apply all of the information He has taught the psalmist (in response to his prayers) to every situation and circumstance that arises on the journey. And he has strong reason to make this appeal.

His appeal is based on a life that has consistently demonstrated a strong trust in the Lord’s statements. The term “commandments” is the term for “sayings” or “statements.”

And the psalmist has put his confidence in those statements from Yahweh's mouth. Moreover, his confidence has been exhibited in a life spent in an attempt to obey those statements. In other words, his belief was not merely creedal in nature. It was at least creedal in that he believed what God said but it was more than that. He actually acted according to his creed! What he believed about God in creed established and directed the deeds of his life. And so, based on a life of committed obedience to God's statements, he came before God asking for more instruction. He asked what every pilgrim must ask – that God would develop in him moral discernment by continuing to cultivate a deeper confidence in and obedience to His statements.

II. His Personal Testimony (vv. 67-68)

Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. ⁶⁸ You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes.

The Psalmist has testified that God's dealings with him have been good. And he has requested that God would increase his discernment and perception of life according to His Word. But how did God answer that prayer for the Psalmist? The answer comes in the next two verses where the Psalmist continues to amplify his personal testimony about the goodness of God in all things.

About His Life. *Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word (v. 67).* In light of his past tendency to “stray” or “err” from the boundaries of the path set by God's Word, he considers how God corrected his discernment and adjusted his perception so that he no longer strayed from the path. And the tool God used to make this adjustment was affliction. Here in his own words is the testimony regarding his past pattern – he consistently strayed. The term “astray” does not refer to “high-handed sins” or to overt, angry rebellion. Rather the term refers to the constant straying and missteps of a sheep that is attempting to follow the Shepherd. How did God break this pattern in the Psalmist? Through affliction – by bringing him low. Remember the Psalmist expressed his desire to walk in the way of the Word in most strenuous terms back in the first stanza of the psalm. He also gave ample testimony to the difficulty he had in consistently walking in that way. How did God graciously deal with this tendency in order to grant the Psalmist his original desire – to walk in the way of the Word? By bringing him low and humbling him in the school of affliction. And from that low place – in the dust to which his soul cleaved – he learned to obey the Word he had come to love! In other words, in God's goodness He acted “goodly” toward His servant by humbling him so he would learn to do “good.”

About His Lord. *You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes (v.68).*

The Psalmist's testimony regarding God (You have done good to Your servant) was grounded in his affirmation about God. He was completely and thoroughly convinced of God's goodness. All of God's actions flow out of His attributes. When a man has an unshakable conviction that God is good, this conviction shapes his understanding of all that God brings into his life. This is how the Psalmist can look at all his affliction and see it all as good. And he can count it all good because it is coming from the hand of a God Who is good. And in light of this firm conviction, the Psalmist turns to His good God and requests even more instruction in His statutes.

Affliction was the school in which he learned discernment and developed spiritual perspective and looking back on the assignments in the course called affliction, the psalmist testified that God had been doing good all the while. But what about his present circumstances?

III. His Present Circumstances (vv. 69-70)

The proud have forged a lie against me, But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. ⁷⁰ Their heart is as fat as grease, But I delight in Your law.

It is one thing to look back on trials that are past and rejoice in the providential goodness of God during difficult days that have come and gone. But what about the here and

now? How well will the lessons he learned yesterday serve him today? To this our Pilgrim now turns. His old enemies from stanza three have resurfaced. The arrogant and insolent men have once again come against him. How will he respond? What has affliction taught him?

The Attitude of His Enemies. Immediately we are informed that these enemies have not changed. They are as arrogant and insolent as they were earlier in the psalm. They are obstinate and hard hearted. Literally, their hearts are fat with “fat.” They are impervious to God’s Word and hardened against God’s way. One might inquire as to the reason for their hardness and the text gives a subtle clue. What has hardened their heart is “fatness.” In Old Testament language, fatness had reference to wealth or material possessions. Their material possessions and their commitment to live for materialism had hardened them against God, His Word, and His ways. In contrast to this the Psalmist has found satisfaction in God’s Word. If the prosperity of the wicked hardened them and drew them away from God, the promises of God softened the heart of the Psalmist and drew him irresistibly to the way of the Word! He found ultimate satisfaction in this life in the very thing these insolent men rejected – the Law of the Lord.

The Activity of His Enemies. These men were not passive in their opposition. They smeared him with lies and falsehood. They plastered over his life with false statements about his character. Centuries later Christ would tell his followers to count such affliction as occasion for great joy (Matthew 5:11). Peter would confirm the Lord’s advice to his own readers (1 Peter 4:14-16). How has the psalmist learned to respond to such opposition? In the third stanza he was cast down and almost thrown from the path. However, in the school of affliction he has learned to stand and rejoice.

The Affirmation of the Psalmist. *But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. . . But I delight in Your law.* Note the strong contrast the Psalmist makes here. They are insolent and arrogant BUT I will keep your precepts. They are hardened and impervious to your laws BUT I delight in that law! Rather than respond defensively or react dejectedly, our Pilgrim firmly and joyfully declares his resolve to give himself to an unreserved obedience to God’s Word and will!

IV. His Powerful Perception (vv. 71-72)

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. ⁷² *The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.*

Our Pilgrim has learned his lessons well in God’s school of affliction. In every verse of this stanza he makes reference to some term for the Word of God and he observes that God’s words are the source of all the “good” that God conveys to His servants. How does God convey that goodness? Through His character and His Word. And the context in which that goodness is delivered is often one of affliction and difficulty. The Psalmist has learned that such blessing on the path he has chosen comes as a result of confidence in God’s words and obedience to the will of God expressed in and by those words. And so he comes full circle and concludes the stanza where he began – testifying that it is good that he has been afflicted!

His Statement. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted.* He looks back and affirms again the value and spiritual benefit of affliction in the life of a believer who desires to walk the way of God’s Word. He began with this observation and he has not changed his mind. He recalled the past circumstances of personal affliction and said, “It is good to be afflicted.” He recounts his present circumstances in which his old enemies have resurfaced and with even greater resolution declares, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted!” But now he offers a fuller explanation for his perspective on what has happened to him thus far on the journey.

His Explanation. *That I may learn Your statutes.* As a consequence of affliction, God has given him what he initially desired. In order to be like those men he observed who

were unusually blessed of God he discovered that he would need to know and obey God's Word. This is the divine instrument by which a young man might cleanse His ways. It is the light that God has given to direct his feet on the path to blessing. And he desired this . . . with all his heart! In fact, he cried out to God, "Oh that my ways were directed to keep your statutes (v. 5). And, God Who is good heard his prayer and granted his desire. But the answer to his prayer came through the school of affliction. So, has it happened? Did God change the Psalmist's heart? Remember that the Psalmist asked God to teach him the way of His statutes (v. 33). He requested that God would make him walk in the path He had commanded (v. 34)? Now he is doing so!

But the Psalmist didn't just ask for instruction and external conformity. He asked the Lord to change the way his heart functioned. He asked God to incline his heart toward God's testimonies and away from covetousness (v. 36). He asked the Lord to turn his eyes away from worthless things (v. 37). Did God answer that part of the Psalmist's prayer?

His Application. *The law of your mouth is better than thousands of coins of gold and silver.* This is the full explanation for why the Psalmist can say that affliction has been good for him! It is good because it gave to him the true desire of his heart. What he has come to desire supremely in life is God's Word. What men value most on earth is gold and silver. The Psalmist testifies that he desires something even more than thousands of gold or silver coins – the Word of God! And he has asked the Lord to instruct him in this word and he desires to be able to use this word to develop discernment and perspective on all of life. God responded to that desire and his prayer by sending affliction to humble him so that he might be made more dependent on the Word he so desired. And when there was nothing else to cling to but the Word, he discovered that it was more sufficient and secure than any security on earth. When there was nothing left to him but God's Word, he discovered it to be a treasure richer than anything else on earth.

And this perspective, that God's Word is better than gold or silver, is itself evidence that through affliction, God has graciously answered the psalmist's prayer and granted him both discernment and perspective so that now he sees all things in life as good because they come from the hand of a God Whose character is good and whose purpose for His people is good. Paul would restate this perspective in the familiar words of his letter to the Romans, "*all things work together for good to them who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose*" (Rom 8:28).

And so all that remains is for those of us who have chosen the same path as the Psalmist to examine our hearts to see how far we have progressed on the path. Have we come to the place in our journey where we can honestly affirm what the Psalmist has unreservedly affirmed? His testimony is intended to challenge us to consider both his way and his God!

How do we define "good" from God? Many believers define "good" from God in terms of possessions and provision – thousands of gold and silver. But those who have passed through God's school of affliction have come to see "good" from a different perspective. These pilgrims define "good" from God not in terms of provision but rather in terms of position and perspective. The good they delight in is God bringing them to the position where they are no longer straying from the path or wandering from His precepts. In fact, they would rather have a life absent of provisions and possessions if it was the way they could live a life that was consistently obedient to God's Word and stable in God's way!

So here is the test for us. If we had the opportunity to have either possessions /provisions from God (thousands of gold and silver) or spiritual perspective and consistent obedience to God's Word – which would we chose? And what if the way to get spiritual consistency before the Lord involved not just the lack of possessions/provisions but affliction and suffering? Which would we chose? Our answer is a good indicator of where we are on the path we claim to want to walk as pilgrims on the way of the Word!

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Safe in the Storm

Stanza 12

Verses 89-96

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.⁹⁰ Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.⁹¹ They continue this day according to Your ordinances, For all are Your servants.⁹² Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.⁹³ I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life.⁹⁴ I am Yours, save me; For I have sought Your precepts.⁹⁵ The wicked wait for me to destroy me, But I will consider Your testimonies.⁹⁶ I have seen the consummation of all perfection, But Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

In the last stanza we walked with the Psalmist through perhaps the darkest part of the path thus far on his pilgrimage. We listened in to the cry of his soul as the little boat of his life was ravaged by the fierce storm of persecution and affliction. During this “dark night of the soul” our Psalmist cried out to God but received no immediately answer. In fact, to the Psalmist, it appeared as though God not only was not listening, even worse He had abandoned His servant to the mercies of the storm itself. In one anguished metaphor the Psalmist opened a window revealing the unstated desperation, agony, and loneliness that sometimes comes to those who pursue God Who for a time remains hidden as well as silent. Even God’s providence seemed to have turned against our man. Confused, alone, and desperate the Psalmist told the Lord he felt like a forgotten wineskin that over time had become dry and brittle.

One wise commentator observed that the first eleven stanzas of the psalm lead us down a path that is progressively more difficult and dark until at last we wonder whether the Psalmist is right in asking God if he has been forgotten and abandoned. We can almost hear his question: “Has the Lord brought me thus far only to abandon me?” The same commentator noted that the answer comes in stanza twelve and the rest of the stanzas in the psalm develop the concept that comforted the psalmist during his soul’s dark night: “His Word is reliable and He will complete His work in me!”

When the psalmist arrives at the twelfth stanza (vv. 89-96), he has reached the nadir of his experience and he has survived! He has not perished at the hands of the insolent, wicked men who have plotted against him at every turn of the path. Instead, he has emerged even more committed to walking the way of the Word that he might please the God Who gave that Word. In fact, it is precisely his unshakeable confidence in the Word that has helped him remain faithful to the God who for a time remained unseen and unheard.

Where did our Pilgrim friend find solid ground on which to plant his feet in the midst of the storm? What strong anchor held his soul secure as the waves threatened to inundate his little boat? What hiding place gave him safe and secure? And perhaps more importantly, where can we find such help in our own struggles?

Swiftly comes the answer. “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations!” It is Yahweh Himself that is his security and stability. This comes as no surprise to any true child of God. After all, we all recognize that God is our refuge and strength. We know Him to be a very present help in time of trouble. But – what do we do when we can’t find our way to Him in the storm? When He is silent no matter how loud or long we cry? When He is absent no matter how hard we look or how often we come seeking His comfort and help. In short, if God is our refuge and our strength, then we must have some sure way of accessing that ground when we most need it. In other words, we must be able to find our way to God in the midst of the stormy waves at 2:00 a.m. on Thursday and not just from the safety of our pew on Sunday! Where is that access and how do we procure it for our own in time of need? The Psalmist unfolds the answer in his own testimony articulated in the eight verses that comprise this stanza.

We See Solid Ground by Remembering God’s Character (vv. 89-91)

Forever! The language of the Psalmists points to something that is fixed and unalterable. Unchangeable no matter who or what comes with the determined intention of bringing about a change or a reversal. Firm. Strong. Lasting. And what is this forever thing? God’s Word! In the midst of a life that is being blown about by the winds of persecution, the Psalmist sees solid ground and seizes this ground in an unbreakable grip. God’s Word is forever fixed in Heaven. It is unalterable, unchangeable, always the same. And therefore it is an anchor that can secure the soul even in the most violent storm. God has spoken in the past and what He has said is unchangeable. And because it has this forever quality, God’s Word is supremely reliable ground on which to stand in the midst of crisis, especially one as devastating as that of our Pilgrim.

But what makes the Word of God such sure ground? What gives it this kind of reliability? What makes it “forever” settled in heaven? The answer might seem almost too simple at first blush. However, upon further reflection, the psalmist’s statement takes on a level of profundity that is actually enhanced by its simplicity. What gives God’s Word its “forever-fixed-in-heaven” nature is its source. God. In other words, the reason God’s Word has this quality is because of Who God is and what He is like. And the quality that the Psalmist immediately points to is the one we most need in a crisis – His faithfulness. Our Pilgrim observes that God’s faithfulness continues from generation to generation. There never has been a generation from Adam to our own where God has been unfaithful to His character, His Word, His promises, or His people. From generation to generation since the creation of the world, God’s faithfulness has continued.

This is important because in the midst of a crisis when we are overwhelmed by the darkness of the night around us, we actually wonder about this very thing – the faithfulness of God in general and to us in particular. God’s everlasting faithfulness is the ground on which His Word is forever fixed! So, given the importance of this ground, how do we verify that God has indeed been faithful? The evidence the Psalmist presents in verse 90 is God’s creation.

Here is the progression thus far in the stanza. God’s word is firmly settled in Heaven. God’s faithfulness has been evidenced continually from generation to generation. God’s creation has been permanently established and it stands. The terms here speak of the earth as something that God ordained and from that time to this it has remained in place exactly as God planned and ordained it to be. And this is exactly what the Psalmist points by describing the creation (earth) as servants of God (v. 92). In other words, all of creation has and continues to do exactly what God ordained it to do. It works and has been sustained exactly as God planned and according to His purpose. Creation was created by God’s powerful word. It is being sustained by God’s faithful Word. And it functions and operates according to God’s authoritative Word.

Creation therefore is a visible and undeniable evidence that God is indeed faithful and that His faithfulness endures from generation to generation. As long as there is a creation,

there is a Faithful One who is sustaining that creation by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). And the place that reveals this Faithful One is the authoritative Word He revealed that is forever fixed in heaven! A more theologically complex way of stating this truth would be: God's special revelation is grounded on God's Character. God's general revelation affirms and confirms God's Character. But, in order to know the nature of His character, we must rest on God's special revelation, the Bible, especially when it evaluates our character as that character is revealed by our circumstances.

We Reach Solid Ground by Reviewing Our Character through the Lens of Circumstance (v. 92)

As our Pilgrim reviewed his circumstances he observed he would have perished but for one thing – his personal commitment to God's instruction (law). The terms he used are graphic and powerful. The term "perish" is used in Job 6:18 to describe the horrible fate of caravans that turn aside from the road in the desert to paths that lead them nowhere but to the barren wasteland where all are brought to destruction. The term "affliction" portrays an abject humiliation or devastation that comes when a person has been reduced to nothing in the sight of his enemies. This would have been his fate but for one thing – his delight in God's law. Escape from the snares craftily set to entrap him came about as our Pilgrim was guided and instructed by God's law! Years earlier, Moses had reminded Israel that the book God had given would be their wisdom (Dt. 4:5-6). Centuries later, our Pilgrim has found that God's faithfulness in that promise had indeed been true from that generation to his own. And in light of his own personal experience of God's faithfulness, our Pilgrim renews his commitment to remain faithful to the God Who had given such a wonderfully reliable Word!

We Remain on Solid Ground by Recommitting to Godly Character (vv. 93-94)

As our Pilgrim slowly gains stable spiritual footing, he looks back on all that he has reviewed regarding God's faithfulness and as revealed by God's faithful Word and he cries out, "I will never forget your precepts!" The term "forget" as we have already observed in this psalm does not mean just that the psalmist will retain a mental knowledge of the content of God's precepts. Rather, in using this term the psalmist is committing himself to the ethical and moral expectations of those Divine precepts. More than just knowing what God expects, the psalmist recommit himself to his original quest – to walk in the way of God's Word! To live according to its mandates. To measure up to its expectations. To be guided by its instruction. To wait confidently for its promises. To never abandon in conduct or in character all that God's Word reveals as God's desire for His children. And the reason our Pilgrim is so ready to recommit to the way of life revealed by God's precepts is that by them, God gave him life spiritually in the first place. In this he is not arguing that his spiritual life (salvation) was earned by keeping these precepts. Rather, he is arguing that through this Word (precepts) and genuine belief in what it teaches, God granted him spiritual life (cf. Rom 1:16; 10:17).

This commitment becomes the ground for a solid conviction on the part of the Psalmist – "I am Yours!" (v. 94). His heart for God's ordinances revealed the psalmist's true paternity. He belonged to God. His love for and relationship to God's "forever-settled-in-heaven-word" revealed conclusively the Psalmist's identity as truly belonging to God. And this identity becomes the basis for a strong cry – "Save me!!" Interestingly, though he grounds his cry in his confirmed relationship to God ("I am Yours") that is not all he appeals to when he cries for deliverance. He grounds the front end of his cry for help on his relationship to God. But the back end of his cry is firmly established in his consistent walk of obedience before God (v. 94b).

Our pilgrim can cry for help and argue that God should give it on more than just the fact that God is faithful and His Word is reliable. He can give an important additional reason for why God should deliver him and act on his behalf. "Because I have sought your precepts." He has made variations of this argument before and he uses it again here because, frankly, it is powerful. Why should God deliver him? Because of how he has used the life

God has given him thus far in his journey. Rather than squander his life and energy on worthless things or worse, sinful things, our Pilgrim has diligently invested himself in seeking to learn, understand, and do God's precepts. No wonder he can cry so boldly and confidently for God to deliver him!

Just as creation has been faithfully serving God and God has faithfully preserved it (vv. 89-91), the Psalmist has also faithfully served God by seeking and doing His precepts. Consequently, he can expectantly appeal to God to do for him as He has done for creation for all of these years. And at the heart of his appeal is his relationship to God through His Word. Which brings us to the final observation our Psalmist makes as he regains his footing once again on the solid ground of the pathway of God's Word.

We Rest on Solid Ground by Recognizing the Character of God's Word (vv. 95-96)

Our pilgrim closes this stanza by observing that his circumstances have not changed at all. The wicked almost destroyed him (v. 92) and they have not given up in their attempts (v. 95). Like fierce predatory beasts they patiently stalk their prey waiting for an opportune moment to pounce and destroy him. Knowing this makes his response even more amazing. Rather than focus attention on discovering their plans and identities, our Pilgrim focuses all of his attention to God's stated reminders of how life will unfold when certain actions are taken by His children. "I will consider thy testimonies." This speaks of much more than a casual glance or mindless hearing of those testimonies. To consider means to study like Ezra did as a prepared scribe in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:10). It means to meditate on these testimonies day and night like the psalmist spoke of doing in Psalm 1:2. Rather than react in fear to what the wicked were plotting, our Pilgrim mediated on what God said life would be like for those who lived according to His precepts and were guided and directed in their responses and in their ways by His testimonies. In other words, God's Word provides solid and stable ground in the midst of a fallen and depraved society.

It also provides solid and stable ground for people living in a finite and limited society. The Psalmist ends this stanza by noting that he has seen the end of perfection (v. 96). This means that as he looks at life and sees the very best that exists in creation or among men, it is inherently limited. He has seen and observed the limitations of all earthly perfections. If our Pilgrim is indeed Daniel of old, think of the perfections of human wisdom and culture that existed all around him in ancient Babylon. Babylonian culture was legendary for the wisdom of its wise men, the Chaldeans. Yet Daniel saw the limitation of that wisdom in the inability of those wise men to interpret the King's dream (Daniel 2). Daniel saw the awesome power and might of Nebuchadnezzar to conquer and rule the world of his day come to a humiliating halt as the king spent seven years in shocking madness (Daniel 4). He saw the awesome wonder of the hanging gardens of the city and the massive impregnable walls of that city and they were brought to nothing in one night by the Persian invasion. Truly he had seen all earthly perfections and discovered their limits. But, there was one thing that was broader than all earthly wisdoms – a wisdom from above that is exceedingly broad! A perfect wisdom not bound by the limitations of all earthly wisdom – the commandment of God! A Word forever settled in Heaven and therefore not limited by the same constraints that bound the wisdom of fallen men.

And it was this wisdom to which our Psalmist attached himself. By it he would chose to live and be instructed. To it he would flee for protection. Under it he would rest and find shelter in the storm. In it he would find life and joy. From it he would gain strength for another day's journey.

To this book we must also flee. In this book we must also rest. It will be our wisdom as well. And in its instruction we will find all that we need for life and godliness no matter how dark the night or how violent the storm may be that assails us on the journey. We stand on solid ground when we stand on a Word from God that is forever settled in heaven. Because it is so, it is a secure standing place for us during our pilgrimage on earth.

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Our Heart's True Desire

Stanza 13 – Verses 97-104

(Part 1)

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.⁹⁸ You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me.⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.¹⁰¹ I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.¹⁰² I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me.¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!¹⁰⁴ Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

In the two previous stanzas the Psalmist opened a window allowing us to peer into his soul as he walked a dark and difficult portion of the path. With painful honesty, he articulated how he felt as he languished in the house of affliction where God fed him the bread of sorrow. Sooner or later all pilgrims who choose to walk the Way of the Word will join him at this table. And when we do, we will desperately seek the same comfort that sustained him. We will look to the same source for deliverance. God's words provided comfort as well as deliverance to the Psalmist and will do so for all pilgrims who follow his example and cultivate his commitment to that Word in all of their ways for all of their days.

Interestingly, most Christians would confidently assert the same claim the Psalmist makes to love God's law in the opening verse of the stanza! Many believers confidently assert their undying adoration of God's Word without considering that they may be asked to confirm that claim. Many who claim to love the Bible more than life itself have scant evidence of their utter devotion. In some cases their evidence comes in the form of a misplaced loyalty to a particular version of God's Word while their lives or ministries reflect almost no conformity to the demands contained therein. Sometimes their love consists primarily of speaking and singing about God's Word in church but there is no willingness to conform to the demands of Scripture throughout the rest of their lives. However, this was not the case with the Psalmist. Nor can it be the case with any pilgrim who desires to experience the stability in suffering and affliction displayed by the Psalmist throughout his spiritual journey. His bold assertion to love God's law rang true in the context of his daily life. It can and must ring true in ours.

I. His Confident Confession (v 97a)

Oh, how I love Your law!

The Psalmist begins this stanza by proclaiming his love for God's law in unmistakable, passionate terms that spring from the depth of his heart. Interestingly, this passionate love for God's law is equally sweet to his soul (v. 103). So passionate is his confession of this love for God's law that it is the sole focus of the stanza. There are no petitions to the Lord, no mention of afflictions, and no trace of the depressed emotional state that permeated the previous two stanzas. Instead, there is a cry of joyful affirmation expressing pure, unadulterated love for God's law. However, this is neither the first or only

time the Psalmist declares his love for God's Word. He affirms his love for God's commandments in verses 47, 48, and 127. He proclaims his love for God's statutes or testimonies in verse 119. He expresses his love of God's precepts in verse 159. Here he loves God's instruction or "torah". He reiterates this love for God's law in verses 113 and 163. Clearly, he has come to love the Word of God and this love becomes a dominant theme throughout his pilgrimage.

Not only does this stanza proclaim his love for God's law, it also contains information that helps to further clarify the nature of his claim. What exactly is the nature of his love for God's Word? Often the term love directs attention to one's affinity for something or someone. However, the particular term employed by the Psalmist actually focuses on a different component of love than affinity or affection. The term is used often in the Old Testament in contexts where obedience is mentioned as an expected traveling companion to this word. It has reference to commitment to something or someone that displays itself in appropriate actions and responses. For example, in Exodus 20:6 God stated that He would show lovingkindness to those who love Him and keep His commandments. In Deuteronomy 10:13-13 Moses reminded Israel that God's requirements of them were not burdensome nor numerous. Rather they were to fear the Lord, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with all their heart and soul, and keep His commandments and statutes.

So, when the Psalmist proclaims his love for God's Word, he is not merely articulating a fond affection for God's instructions. He is expressing his personal commitment to living them out in his walk by conforming his life to those instructions. The object of his committed love is none other than the "torah" of God – God's revealed will for the life of His servant.

This claim is no small matter for the Psalmist. Loving God means loving His Word and no one loves God's Word who does not consistently attempt to conform to its demands. There are many who are quick to affirm a love for God's Word whose life betrays the truth – they have no real commitment to that Word. They may have a fond affection for it as long as it does not intrude into their life or make uncomfortable demands upon them. In some cases they may even make bold affirmations about the Word of God that sound impressive in the Sanctuary and among the congregation of the righteous. However, upon encountering that individual in the way of life outside of the Sanctuary, his claim to love God's law vanishes like misty breath on a cold morning. However, there is sure evidence to back up the claim of a man who boldly asserts his love for God's Word.

II. His Confirmatory Evidence (vv. 97b, 98b, 99b)

. . . it is my meditation all the day.

Is there any defining biblical evidence confirming someone's claim to love God's law? How can a claim like this truly be evaluated? This stanza affirms such evidence exists and provides an accurate revelation of what comprises such evidence. The evidence includes experiencing the benefits of such a love for God's law in personal life. It includes consistently applying God's instruction or "torah" to the practices and habits of life. It is displayed in spiritual responses that are defined and set by God's Word to the circumstances of life. All of these are important confirmatory evidences that support a man's claim to truly love the Word of God. However, there is one primary piece of evidence without which none of the other pieces are possible. And it is precisely this piece of evidence that the Psalmist presents from his life as the starting place for establishing the veracity of his claim to love God's Word. This first and primary evidence is his constant practice of meditating on God's Word.

What exactly does the Psalmist mean when he states that God's Law is his meditation all the day? Meditation in this stanza (and in the Scriptures in general) implies more than just quiet contemplation. Meditation is not passive. It is an active musing or thoughtful contemplation of all or a portion of God's Word. Meditation implies more than careful thought about God's Word; it implies an objective for such thought – the intentional

application of the conclusions of biblical meditation to one's life and practice. This is what David referred to in Psalm 1 when he talked about the "blessed man" who meditates on the Law of God day and night (Psalm 1:2). It is evident from the rest of the verses in Psalm 1 that this man is doing his meditating in the midst of the activity of life rather than while locked away in seclusion. His meditation caused him to reject specific counsel he receives from certain kinds of people. Meditating on God's Law caused him to avoid the walk or life practices of certain individuals. His constant meditation on God's Word helped him to recognize and reject the values and mindset of those who reject God's authority and refuse His instruction. This is in essence the practice of our Pilgrim. He meditates or concentrates on God's Laws constantly to the point that he can say, "they are always with me!" (v. 98).

But while this may have always been his desire, he gives evidence in the psalm that this practice may have developed progressively in his life. He has spoken of his commitment to meditate on God's Word on several occasions earlier in the psalm. For instance, he mentions his intention to meditate on God's precepts in verse 15 of the second stanza where we find that he is actually doing so when faced by opposition (v. 23). He promises to meditate on God's wonders in the third stanza if God will help him to understand the pathway described in God's precepts (v. 27). If God will send lovingkindness to the psalmist, he promises to meditate on God's statutes (v. 48). He observes the practice of the wicked and determines to respond by meditating on God's precepts (v. 78). At this point in his journey he has come to understand the importance of meditation and has full intention to do so in his life – but it is still an intention. We find him actually doing some meditating in verse 27, but for the most part, during the first stages of his pilgrimage, meditation, though certainly valued, remains his aspiration and intention.

However, by the time we meet our pilgrim in this stanza, meditation has gone beyond aspired intention to firm and committed practice. He is actually doing what in previous stanzas may have been his good intention. Now it is his constant practice. God's words are with him all the time (v. 98). They are his constant meditation (v. 99). This practice remains his throughout the remaining stanzas of the psalm and actually becomes sweeter. For instance, in verse 148 the psalmist expresses his longing for night to fall that he might have quiet, uninterrupted time to contemplate and consider God's Word without the interruptions and distractions of life during the day! Clearly, our pilgrim has progressed in his ability and desire to meditate on God's Word. And so can we.

Meditation is a primary evidence of deep devotion to God and to His Word. As believers we instinctively know this to be true and we initially aspire to make this practice a consistent reality in our lives. And so we set off like the Psalmist did in the second stanza to meditate on God's Word by reading it carefully and regularly. Obviously, this is where biblical meditation starts. Without regular, careful reading of God's Word, meditation becomes an exercise in subjective frivolity. Meditation implies careful, considered contemplation on the precise statements that God has given which requires that we know and understand those statements. So meditation begins with regular and careful reading of Scripture. However, for meditation to become a constant activity in our lives, we must cultivate the ability to carry God's Word with us wherever we go. We must develop the ability to recall the relevant portions of God's word precisely when we face particular circumstances and situations that often arise unexpectedly in life.

Conclusion:

Interestingly, it appears from the Psalmist's journey that it was the unexpected, unforeseen circumstances of opposition, affliction, or personal failure that drove the Psalmist to the Scripture to discover and retain the guidance and instruction contained therein for such circumstances in life. In other words, we don't become good at meditation through our good intentions. We become good at meditation when the storms of life force us to the Word for survival. We don't become good "meditators" to impress God or others but rather to survive life! Find a man who meditates deeply on the Word of God and whose words and ways are shaped by that Word and you will find a man who bears the scars of affliction, suffering, and trial in the way. In the house of suffering, God teaches us He is our relief. At the table of

affliction and sorrow we learn that God is our comfort. As we face opposition from our closest fellows, God reminds us that He is our friend and defender. Even with our face pressed hard into the dust of personal failure, we discover God is our health and deliverance. When we face a fork in the path, God's Word gives accurate and reliable guidance.

Unfortunately, in the early portion of the journey we tend to learn this last lesson by taking wrong forks and having to return to God's Word for guidance back to the right path. However, as we continue to come back to God's Word for help, as the reading of it becomes our committed, daily practice, and as we insist on an exact obedience to it in our own lives, in time we will find ourselves saying with the Psalmist, "Oh how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day!"

Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Our Heart's True Desire

Stanza 13 – Verses 97-104

(Part 2)

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.⁹⁸ You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; For they are ever with me.⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the ancients, Because I keep Your precepts.¹⁰¹ I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.¹⁰² I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me.¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!¹⁰⁴ Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.

In the previous edition of Truth Talk we began exploring the amazing claim made by the Psalmist regarding his deep, passionate, unshakeable love for God's Word. The opening verses in the stanza helped us to understand the nature of that love as being much more than fond affirmation of the Scriptures or spiritual platitudes about God's Word. Instead, when we probed the text, we discovered that the sort of love expressed by the Psalmist involved a deep commitment to absorb the Word into his life so that his walk and his ways might be shaped by and conformed to all that God has said. This is what it means to love the Word of God!

Furthermore, we noted that the first evidence to substantiate a man's claim to this sort of love for God's Word had to do with whether or not that man biblically meditates on the Word he claims to love. Meditation as described in the Scripture is not a passive activity. Nor is it merely contemplating spiritual ideas on our own and then going in search of a text to justify them. Meditation is a spiritual discipline that seriously undertakes to know, understand, retain, and apply the precise statements God has made as they relate to specific circumstances and situations that arise in life. Furthermore, this is not a tedious burdensome practice but one in which he takes delight. Leupold made this observation when commenting on meditation in Psalm 1:2, "It is to him not a troublesome and unwelcome fetter; it is not a set of hard restraints. It is a joy for him to learn and to do the demands of the law."

This delightful occupation has a specific objective in view – the application of God's Word to life for the shaping of character and the determination of responses. In other words, meditation is a means to a goal and the goal is living a life that pleases God in every way by conforming to His Word. This is not meditation for meditation's sake! Rather, it is meditation for the purpose of life transformation. Leupold put it this way, "Obviously not an unwholesome absorption with the law is under consideration but a healthy interest in it and a knowledge of its real content, which continually influence and affect the man so devoted to this holy treasure."

So, loving God's Word is evidenced by a man's constant meditation upon its precepts in order that he might live his life guided by its instruction. However, such a life of meditation results in a wonderful benefit gained from God's Word – wisdom! When a man truly loves God's Word and as a result spends time reading and understanding that Word,

God Himself imparts wisdom from that Word to His servant. This wonderful benefit is the third aspect addressed in this stanza and the one to which we now direct our attention.

Note: In the previous edition we considered:

I. His Confident Confession (v. 97a)

II. His Confirmatory Evidence (vv. 97b, 98b, 99b)

III. His Consequential Benefit (vv. 98-100)

The Psalmist gives personal testimony to the benefit of cultivating a love for God's law that expresses itself in constant biblical meditation on what God has said in His Word. The supreme benefit of living this way is the obtaining of true biblical wisdom.

The nature of this wisdom

The wisdom described in this stanza is expressed in three terms designed to help us understand the full-orbed nature of what God has promised to give to those who meditate on His Words.

The first term is translated by the word "wisdom" in most translations. In verse 98 the verb form indicates that the psalmist has been made wise and what has made him wise are God's commandments. Wisdom in this sense has to do with skill or ability based on accurate and comprehensive knowledge one has learned to properly apply to life. Zemek described it this way, "It is the adaptation of what we know to what we have to do." So the first component of the full-orbed wisdom that comes to a man who meditates on God's Word is the skill and ability to take the knowledge he is gaining and adapt it properly to his life.

The second term used by the Psalmist is translated as "understanding" in verse 99. This term points to the component of insight that leads to prudence. It is more than just the ability to recall the information or reproduce the facts. It is the ability to penetrate into the true meaning of that information and to discern not just the meaning but the intent of the message. This is something that natural men do not possess innately (Psalm 14:2-3). Consequently men who fail to value God's Word properly soon depart from the proper path in life. Conversely, those who value God's Word and treasure it in their heart find themselves almost instinctively knowing what path is right before God. From this "understanding" gained from biblical meditation comes prudent conversation and conduct.

The final term used in this stanza to describe the wisdom that comes to those who meditate on God's Word is the term "discernment." It is translated as "understanding" in verse 100 but the Hebrew term is different than the one translated in verse 99, though our English translations have rendered them both "understanding." This third term speaks of the ability to discern rightly so as to make right choices and render appropriate decisions. When a man possesses wisdom, understanding, and discernment, he possesses a treasure of inestimable worth.

The value of this wisdom

The value of this wonderful wisdom gained from constant, careful meditation in God's Word is that it makes a man wiser than those who surround him and attempt to influence him in some way or another as he journeys on the pathway of the Word. In this case, the Psalmist points out that his love for God's Word and his meditation upon it has made him wiser than three classes of people commonly encountered by all of God's true pilgrims.

First, following God's commands has made him wiser than the craftiest of his enemies (v. 98). If his enemies are his own fellow Israelites, then they would have shared his knowledge of the commandments. They would have possessed the same information as the Psalmist. However, the difference between our Pilgrim and his enemies is what he chose to

do with the information he possessed. He obeyed God's commands while his enemies ignored them. Consequently, his obedience to divine expectation made him wiser than those enemies. However, if our Pilgrim was indeed Daniel (as we suggested earlier), then perhaps his enemies were not Israelites but rather pagan Chaldeans. In that case, how did he escape their crafty plots and snares set up to trap and destroy him? God's commandments were his safety. They made him wiser than his enemies and by obeying them, God preserved and elevated him above his fellows. A good case might be the crafty plot laid by the Chaldean magicians in an attempt to discredit Daniel's loyalty to the King and destroy his life from among them. However, as Daniel obeyed God's command to pray, God preserved him from the mouth of the lions. And, at the end of the story, it is Daniel's enemies who end up being destroyed in their own trap and eaten by the very lions they anticipated would eat Daniel.

Not only does this wisdom from God make a man wiser than his enemies, it makes him more insightful than his teachers (v. 99). Our Pilgrim speaks here of penetrating insight into the real nature of truth as he meditated on God's testimonies. Those set up among men as educators are presumed to have attained a certain amount of insight into how matters really are and not just how less-educated men perceive them to be. If our Psalmist is speaking of those in Israel who taught him, the implication again is that knowing about God's Word is not sufficient for gaining wisdom in and from God's Word. There were many "teachers" in Israel who knew God's Word. They could recite it in public worship. They fastidiously preserved it in written form. They even taught its precepts and demands to others. However, the Psalmist claims to have more insight than they. This is an astonishing claim. However, his claim to meditate on the testimony that God has given in His Word surely is the key. A man may know what God has said without truly believing it enough to conform his life to what God has testified. Such a man may know the Word, but his life proves he does not love it enough to live by its truth. Consequently, such a man will eventually suffer failure from lack of following truth even though he possesses the truth that would save him. Perhaps this is what the Psalmist had in mind as he contemplated the many false shepherds in Israel. However, if Daniel wrote this, then perhaps his teachers were those who taught him the tongue and the learning of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:4). These men were the learned men of the day and their fame extended throughout the world. In fact, tradition has it that the Magi who came and visited the Lord after His birth were descendants of the Chaldeans mentioned in the book of Daniel. Daniel, their student, possessed greater insight than any of those who taught him. In fact, his insight was so legendary that it elevated him to the highest position under Darius in the kingdom (Daniel 6:1-3). Earlier, Belshazzar praised Daniel as a man of light and understanding and excellent wisdom (Daniel 5:15-16). Daniel was able to solve enigmas that eluded the wisest of the wise men in the kingdom and he did so under three different monarchs – Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:1-45), Belshazzar (Daniel 5:13-29), and Darius (Daniel 6:1-3). What was it that gave Daniel such penetrating insight? God did. God's testimonies about life and truth guided Daniel to seek God's revelation and to speak it accurately where others were clueless.

Finally, God's wisdom makes a man more discerning than any of his elders (v. 100). The elders in a community are its most senior members. They are the ones to whom the community entrusts leadership and to whom they look for wisdom and direction and from whom they seek wise and just decision. Elders usually get this trust because, well, they are old and have lived long and seen much. The aged in a community like Israel were considered wise and in a community where wisdom was valued, the aged were often the ones who directed the outcome of events and secured the future of the community. Our Pilgrim claims to have more insight and discernment than any of the elders before him. However, he can make this claim not on the strength of his age, but rather on the basis of the source of his wisdom.

The source of this wisdom

God Himself has taught the Psalmist. When one is taught personally by the Ancient of Days, then such wisdom does indeed prove wiser than that of the ancients, for no one is more ancient than the One who is more ancient than days! The Psalmist gives testimony to

the fact that God has indeed taught him this wisdom personally (v. 102). Furthermore, God is willing to teach all who are willing to meet the requirement the Psalmist met in his day.

The requirement of this wisdom

George Zemek observed, “True wisdom does not depend on a life-long experience but rather on obedience to God’s precepts.” As we have noted earlier in our study of this Psalm, the term “precepts” reminds us that God’s Word is not merely His suggestion as to how man might best live a fulfilling life. The term itself speaks of God’s words as divinely fixed and inherently authoritative. They are His declarations of what He has appointed and fixed and therefore requires of those who call upon His name. A man who desires the sort of wisdom articulated here by the Psalmist must be willing to meditate deeply on God’s Word and to give whole-hearted obedience to both the spirit and the letter of God’s orders for life. It is true that information is a necessary component to achieve wisdom; however, information by itself is insufficient to produce the kind of wisdom that is in focus here in this stanza. That sort of wisdom comes only to those who have been personally instructed by God Himself. And to be a student in God’s classroom requires heart-felt obedience on the part of the student to apply what God has taught him to all of life. One commentator put it this way: “You must convert knowledge to wisdom and that requires personal, committed obedience.”

IV. His Consistent Application (vv. 101-102)

Proof that the Psalmist indeed possessed the sort of wisdom described in this stanza comes in the form of consistent application of that wisdom to life’s choices and direction. The application of wisdom to his life kept him from every evil way and bound him tightly to God’s righteous judgments.

The Psalmist has described his life as a pilgrimage on a particular path – the path set forth in the first Psalm as the one whose end brings success and spiritual life to all who choose to walk therein. However, there are other paths available to him. Frequently as he journeys along the right path he is faced with temptations and opportunities to depart from this path for another that appears more appealing or perhaps is more traveled by others. However, he possesses a wisdom that causes him to restrain his feet from paths that many others around him are choosing.

Interestingly, he reminds his readers that these other paths are not just wrong paths, they are evil paths. A wrong turn on a journey is not necessarily a morally-evil turn. If I were traveling from one city to another and took a wrong turn, I am not on a morally-evil road. I am simply on a road that leads me away from my stated destination. Many Christians view life in this way. There are many paths to choose and the vast majority of them are not evil. They may not lead to my stated destination, but they are fine paths nonetheless. However, as you encounter those pilgrims later in the journey their garments have become stained with moral and spiritual defilement that they encountered on the path. The Psalmist makes clear that all other paths but this are not just wrong options, they are evil ones that should be strenuously avoided by God’s people. Walking an evil path and walking in wisdom are mutually incompatible. As Zemek observes, “One cannot be lax about evil and expect to profit in the use of the Word!”

Not only did the Psalmist restrain his feet from the wrong path, he did so with an express purpose in view – that he might better obey God’s Word. There are certain paths that make obedience to God extremely difficult if not impossible and only foolish and careless pilgrims tread thereon. The Psalmist allowed God to choose His path and he followed that particular path in order to obey God’s precepts. Obedience is never easy. However, God has marked out a path for our feet and if we follow that path, He will grant our heart’s desire and enable us to obey His Word. Unfortunately, often our desire influences what path we choose to walk. If we desire to live a lax spiritual life, we will choose the path of least resistance. If, however, we desire to live obediently before our God, then the path laid out in His Word will be our choice as it was for the Psalmist.

The Psalmist restrained his feet from evil paths and he also refused to depart from faithful adherence to God's judgments or decisions about life. He remained spiritually steadfast in the journey. God Himself "torahed" this pilgrim and therefore, he remained faithful to God's declarations. When we sit at God's feet and allow Him to be our teacher, He has a way of insuring we master His material. Unfortunately, many modern pilgrims fail to trust God and instead lean to their own wisdom and understanding and chose paths whose beginnings seem right and good but whose bitter end is death.

V. His Constant Spiritual Responses (vv. 103-104)

The wisdom described in this stanza is evidenced by constant biblical meditation on its source, the Word of God. This wisdom makes a man wiser than his enemies, his educators, and his elders. The application of it restrains God's servant from evil paths and binds him closely to God's judgments, but it has an additional benefit. Wisdom gained from a life of biblical meditation properly shapes a man's internal responses so that he delights in right things and abhors wrong things.

The Psalmist gives testimony that God's words are smooth to his mouth and sweet like honey. The term "sweet" in the first part of the verse is an unusual term that is best rendered "smooth." It speaks to how easily something enters the mouth and goes down one's throat. The best comparison the Psalmist could come up with was honey. In our day, sweet things are readily available. There are hundreds of substances made from sugar and there are scores of artificial sweeteners readily available. To us, unless honey comes in a package at the grocery store, it is not worth the trouble to obtain. However, this was not the case in the ancient world. Honey was one of the sweetest substances available to man. It was greatly valued and men would gladly endure the sting of the bees in order to procure this sweet and refreshing treat. This sweet substance was smooth and soothing as it entered into one's mouth and went down the throat. The eater not only enjoyed a wonderful and tasteful treat, he soon found himself refreshed and revived. This is the effect the Psalmist ascribes to God's Word. It is sweet, smooth, and spiritually refreshing.

Not only did meditation on God's Word properly shape his spiritual tastes, it properly set his emotions. He gave testimony to hating every false way (v. 104). A man whose inner responses have been properly set by God's Word learns to passionately hate certain things. We are not emotionally balanced if all we experience in our life is love for God and for good spiritual things in life. We must also passionately hate the things that oppose God and are contrary to His will.

In the same way that the psalmist's tastes were reshaped so that what is abhorrent to natural men was sweet to him, so what was sweet to the pagan heart became abhorrent to him. His dislike of false ways marked him as one of God's true children and gave weight and credence to his initial claim to love God's laws.

No one who truly loves God's laws can at the same time love the false ways prohibited by those laws. And what changed the natural desires of our Pilgrim into the ones described here was the wisdom gained from God's Word. These are not tastes naturally acquired by fallen men. They are only acquired by sitting at God's table and eating the spiritual bread prepared by Him. Such a life is obtained by faithfully meditating on God's Word and following God's orders!

Conclusion

What does a balanced mature life look like? It looks like a heart with healthy desires. Loving God means hating false ways. False people love false paths. God's servants love God's orders and by them are kept from false paths. The Word of God is sweet to them and in it they find security in life. They learn in advance the folly of the evil way. They choose to be taught by God rather than to be taught by the bitter consequences of wrong choices intentionally made. They learn at the feet of God what

chastened pilgrims give grievous testimony to regarding the evil path. As Bridges stated years ago in his commentary on this stanza, “Inquire of those , whose past wanderings justly give weight and authority to their verdict – ‘What is your retrospective view of these ways?’ Unprofitableness. ‘What is your present view of them?’ Shame. ‘What prospect for eternity would the continuance in them assure to you?’ Death.”

We can end on no better note than the exhortation Bridges had for his readers: “But let me ask myself, have I detected the false ways of my own heart? Little is done in spiritual religion, until my besetting sins are searched out. And let me not be satisfied with forbearance from the outward act. Sin may be restrained, yet not mortified; nor is it enough that I leave it for the present, but I must renounce it forever. Let me not part with it as with a beloved friend, with the hope and purpose of renewing my familiarity with it at a ‘more convenient season’ but let me shake it from me, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, with determination and abhorrence.”

As observed already, “One cannot be lax about evil and expect to profit in the use of the Word.” It is precisely by the use of the Word that we learn to abhor evil! It is through constant meditation upon it that God’s laws, precepts, statutes, judgments, and testimonies become sweet to us like honey. So, let us join the Psalmist in his declaration – “Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation continually.”