

“Heart of Holiness”

Psalm 119.9–16

- ⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.
- ¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.
- ¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.
- ¹² Praise be to you, O LORD;
teach me your decrees.
- ¹³ With my lips I recount
all the laws that come from your mouth.
- ¹⁴ I rejoice in following your statutes
as one rejoices in great riches.
- ¹⁵ I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways.
- ¹⁶ I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Mr. Marshall Malone

9th June, 2010

I was telling my wife that a part of me feared I could not mine for any more treasure in this Psalm. Having dug a little in the first stanza – the faithless wanderer in me wasn't sure what would come next. But I went to verse 9 and it drew me in.

The reason this stanza drew me in was that it asked a question - & did what questions do, begging a response; interesting to me that none of the other stanzas begin with a question – just this one. But there it was.

It is a reminder of the context of this Psalm, which is that it is a CONVERSATION between different parties, beginning with David and God – and then on further reflection, Christ the son with God the Father – and then we see our own conversing of these words to both the world, the church and ultimately to God himself.

It is a conversation with multiple parties, and it gets us away from the self talk and inner monologues that we obsess about in our culture.

It is not a mere subjection - designed to be self affirming or obsessively self-critical. It's not a system of counseling built around analyzing and then reconstructing vein self-talk so that we will be happier and more productive. In fact, this Psalm gets us out of the monologue into a living dialogue with the person whose opinion finally matters.

It gets us into the “**language of asking,**” which is often where we locate wisdom. --- When we place periods at the end of our sentences, it is often like moving forward as if to disengage ourselves from learning or even caring about our conversational partner. But when we ask questions, it draws all parties in, displays interest and offers our patience as a gift.

When my kids tell me about their day, I can respond; “That’s nice...” as if to nicely shew them away, or I can respond, “So what did you do? How did you enjoy that? Will you show me?” In doing so, I am also telling them, “you are valuable to me and I am interested in you and your pursuits.”

Gentle questions can calm the most inflated arguments. “What did you mean by that? Where does that come from? How does that make you feel?” As opposed to responding with accusations, which rarely conforms to Galatians 6: 1 – “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Yet this provides context for us to understand that questions tempered with humility are wise, and when we see one, we should be drawn in and answer it, maybe with another question. When scripture asks a question; well - “farther up and farther in.”

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word.

The Psalm asks the young man a question, but in doing so it is asking – to use a pop-psychology reference – our inner child, as if it had just heard the words of Jesus, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”¹

It is only when we come as children can we hear and obey. When the man heard his savior say, “go sell all your possessions,” we wonder about his response. Was he listening as a wealthy king unto himself or as a son to a father?²

Yet it frames the question in the context of a young man, styling the question as if in response to the 5th commandment, “honor your father and mother...” Those who ponder this law have learned that styling of mother and father is not simply children to their parents, but all inferiors to their superiors, all superiors to their inferiors and all equals to their equals. The context, as with all God’s commands, is to Love God and neighbor.

So we see in this Psalm, that the Law of God is ever present on the mind and heart of author and – we hope - reader, when pondered in the context of grace.

Embedded in verse 1 is the call for young men to keep his way pure, but in doing so, there is a call to fathers (and all superiors) to raise children in the way of purity. The question comes already packed with understanding that there is both a teacher and student – that purity exists and it is good. It then shares the source of such purity and in a way that requires us to walk a path towards that source. That source, of course, is God’s word.

A thoughtful examination of this verse might evoke John’s words:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

“Word, word, word, Christ, Christ Christ...”

The word engages us through the word, which is Christ – and our walk with him cannot move without His purity and cannot be sustained without us being conformed in His likeness. To seek purity is to pursue Christ himself. It is good.

Inner child - walk towards the light.

How can a young man keep his way pure? How can a parent raise a young man? How can pastor shepherd his flock? We must first be the young man, receiving and walking according to the rule of scripture, which is grace itself. Being the young man - receiving instruction.

I said last week that I was envious of young men who were nurtured in the word from childhood, for their lives will bear much fruit. True.

¹ Matt 19:14

² Matt 19:21

So what is it to live according to the word? An obvious example is to obey the commands. Don't commit adultery, don't steal – these are easy to pick out. But the word also tells us, "In the beginning God." To keep this word, you merely need to ponder the goldfish, it's beauty and complexity – praising the creator as you go. The word calls you to stop and pay attention to life around you. It rewards the slow.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to the word. And the word tells those in Christ, "well done..."

¹⁰ I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.

We see in scripture that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"³ It hits us when we look upon the Glory of God – God is infinitely good and we must cover our eyes. His perfection is too much for us. It causes us to quake with fear.

In response, we want to cover up our sins so that they are not discovered – as if it is possible to hide such things from God. But in our sinful state we often seek to please man too, so we bury our secrets and hide our shames, digging our shovels further down and pack them in...stomp, stomp, stomp – not noticing that no grass grows on this soil and eventually our lives are packed with a multitude of well-packed graves. Do not touch, do not let them in...hide, hide, hide.

The TV show *Hoarders* is a 60-minute look inside the lives of different people whose inability to part with their belongings is so out of control that they are on the verge of a personal crisis. The show reveals the inside of homes and their messes, so intense that they cannot walk a straight path to anywhere. Though you cannot smell it on TV, the expression on the faces of the visitors says it all. Putrid, disgusting, vile...and we are so glad it's not us. And yet it is a reflection of how we place our sins and fears in lock boxes, which we allow no one to see – and why we flee or fight when someone pries it open.

Yet the path to freedom lies in a heart that is broken – open. It is well-tilled soil, ready to bring life. It flees to to a God who holds no condemnation for his children. It is a safe place, but it requires your all. No exceptions.

Have you tried to embrace someone who was holding back? You know it immediately because your enthusiasm is ill-matched. The enthusiastic party always knows when the other party is disengaged.

And so it is with God, the true enthusiast, who condescended with His whole self and gave his entire life so that He could have yours.

To seek with your whole heart is a response to the whole of affections that have already been given to you by God. It is as if you have opened the doors to your soul to let the light shine in and dispel the hoarded mess.

³ Jeremiah 17:9

The heart of the man of God exerts himself but does not trust himself – rather he seeks the Lord with his whole heart – with his whole heart he seeks Him.

**¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.**

Your heart is a great treasure, exposed to many dangers that must be guarded with something better than spyware. The best fortress ever created is the word itself, allowing you to not only stop the sin from getting in, but to spot its approach from miles away.

It is remarkable to me that the scriptures I have memorized in life are so treasured to me and relevant in so many circumstances. Yet the slothful servant before you is still slow to memorize the word of God. As I preach to myself in front of you, let me also encourage at least the reading of God's word, if not the full memorization of it. Just as a dash of salt can bring lift to a stew, even a hint of God's word can bring life to you.

Yet talking about scripture memory can come off as being moralistic, another duty where we have failed. Yet this Psalm – again – does not give us a cold instructive moralistic style that crushes us with expectation and failure – “Read your Bible. Study hard. Memorize. Done right, these means contribute to a fluent end. But this psalm doesn't exhort proper means; it demonstrates the radical transformation of one who has opened his heart to the Person who has spoken.

How encouraging to hear that, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing ^[b] her by the washing with water through the word.⁴” Pondering – placing Christ on the forefront of our minds. He is our way out of trouble.

Am I inviting you to drudgery? Only if you think that unlocking a treasure chest is too much work.

And the well-hidden word can do nothing but bring praise, encouraging a desire for even more of it.

**¹² Praise be to you, O LORD;
teach me your decrees.**

Verse 12 reveals adoration that rises from an intense admiration of Christ himself, whom the author is humbly aiming to imitate. He thanks God for what has been shown to him, for what has also been wrought out of him, and he praises him with warmth, reverent love and a deep, deep holy wonder.

The author knows that the Lord is perfectly satisfied in and of himself and that he is the source of all life. There is no other place to go for dialog for ultimate wisdom. David is now placing himself at God's feet. He is the young man seeking wisdom.

⁴ Eph 5:26b

It is a prayer, intertwined with praise – knowing that perfect wisdom cannot come from within man’s heart, but must come from a perfect source...the ultimate source. It is a pursuit of a God who can keep the young man from wandering, from festering and from holding back those things, which bring no life.

¹³ With my lips I recount
all the laws that come from your mouth.

V 13 paints a picture of what happens when Christ is ever present on our thoughts; He changes the content and tenor of our speech. And what we learn in secret we are to proclaim from the housetops; like echoes of his one infallible voice.

Luke tells us: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”⁵

A renewed mind and soul cannot advance without having an impact on our speech. Out of our hearts are new words; “Love, joy, peace,” rather than “mine, mine, mine.”

AND just as a child’s vocabulary strengthens with study and advancing years does a redeemed sinner grow into the speech of the kingdom. He mimics his father by granting you words of affection and kindness.

If we think, “I believe in your commandments,” our words will conform, drifting further from self-absorbed babble to language that builds others up in love.

How can you make poor judgments when the words of your mouth consistently reflect the soul’s occupation with the Lord?

By teaching we learn;
by training the tongue to holy speech we master the whole body;
by familiarity to divine disciplines we are made to delight in righteousness;

So in these three things, we are cleansed by our proclaiming the way of the Lord.
Temptation becomes an opportunity to launch ourselves into the highest of highs.

And how can we not take what God teaches us in secret and declare them on our lips?

¹⁴ I rejoice in following your statutes
as one rejoices in great riches.

The Psalmist not only says that he does rejoice, but that he has rejoiced. His rejoicing had not only arisen out of the word of God, but out of the way it has transformed his life.

We match the heavens when we cry out:

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. ⁶

⁵ Luke 6:45

How can we not rejoice when we have been freed from slavery? No longer in bondage to our own monologue, we are free to converse with the risen savior and listen to him when he says to us – “well done good and faithful servant.” So our circumstances may be poor, but the reality is that our circumstances are quite prosperous indeed.

¹⁵ I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways.

We like to ponder those things, which are pleasant to us. Tell the man on his honeymoon that he must absolutely think about his new wife. It's an absurd notion. Of course he will think about her – it's the greatest thing that ever happened to him. Yet things often tarnish over time, and so the world tries to cloud our view of the riches that attracted us in the first place.

Meditation helps us not only ponder the riches, but reminds us what is so pleasing to us. Those who meditate on the good are also the ones who rejoice.

Are you discouraged about some difficult situation? Bored? Ponder Christ's riches and see how it cheers you.

He makes you lie down in green pastures, beside still waters, He restores your soul, leading you to paths of righteousness. Even through the valley of the shadow of death, you will fear no evil, for God is with you.

Pondering the expressions of conviction and delight

¹⁶ I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.

Is 51: ⁴ "Listen to me, my people;
hear me, my nation:
The law will go out from me;
my justice will become a light to the nations.

Does lovelessness puncture or distemper your life? Are you trodden with worry, fears, sexual lust, betterness, lying, temper, despair, procrastination? Where do you need grown-up help, not good intentions and quick fixes?

“I am Yours. Save me. Teach me.”

Then Listen, watch, hear. Do not fear -take comfort - for Christ is with you always.

⁶ Psalm 19:1,2