

The Word • Psalm 119

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Chapter Eleven

1. Wilfred Benton was an active member of Grace Presbyterian Church.
2. He went to see his pastor, Carl Wattling, for advice
3. You see, he was going through some serious setbacks -
 - a. his business was bad
 - b. his wife and left
 - c. and the bill collectors were after him
 - d. he thought he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown
4. The pastor told him to go home, pray, then pick up his bible and read the first two words he saw -- these would give him the advice he needed
5. Wilfred asked, "Just the first 2 words?"
6. "That's right," said the pastor
7. Wattling didn't hear from Benton again for several months
8. Then one day he saw him out around town, driving a Rolls Royce and a gorgeous woman in the passenger seat
9. Wattling said, "Well Wilfred, I see your situation has changed. You look very prosperous."
10. Wilfred said, "Yes, I took your advice, went home, opened the Bible at random and read the first 2 words."
11. Curious what could effect such a reversal of fortune, the pastor asked, "And what were they?"
12. Wilfred replied, "Chapter Eleven."

B. Lucky Dipping

1. While humorous, the fact is, a lot of people approach the Bible this way
2. They treat it like a medicine chest, coming to it only when they're in need
3. They dispense bible verses like aspirin or a band-aid
4. Others read the bible more regularly, but they have no plan for reading *through* the scriptures
5. They just *lucky-dip* - opening the bible at random and then letting their eye fall to whatever place on the page
6. Now, God can certainly speak to us in this fashion, but it is not the best or safest method of reading the Bible

C. Psalm 119

1. Psalm 119 is the reflection of someone who has love for God's Word that feeds his life
2. No lucky-dipper, the psalmist knows that the key to living well, to living successfully is contained in scripture
3. He sees it, not like a medicine chest, but like a rich mine just waiting to be tapped

4. It may take some work, but the rewards are infinite
5. He is like the man who was out walking in the desert at night when a voice said to him, "Pick up some pebbles, and tomorrow you will be both sorry and glad."
 - a. the man obeyed - he stooped down and picked up a handful of pebbles and put them in his pocket.
 - b. the next morning he reached into his pocket and found diamonds, rubies and emeralds.
 - c. he was both glad and sorry.
 - 1) glad that he had taken some
 - 2) but sorry that he hadn't taken more
 - d. and so it is with God's word

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6. This Psalm is the longest chapter in the Bible
 - a. it is 176 verses
 - b. and every single verse is about God's Word
 - c. whether he is writing about God's law, His statutes, commandments, testimonies, or His ways, - it all speaks to God's Word
 7. There is so much here - I want to concentrate on just a few select verses this morning

II. TEXT

A. V. 9

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

1. Most young people are prone to ask, "How can I *make* my way?" rather than "How can I *cleanse* my way?"
2. It's certainly important for those who are emerging into adulthood to take thought for the future and prepare
 - a. right now, many high school seniors are preparing for college
 - b. they're gathering information about different schools
 - c. taking their SAT's and filling out applications
 - d. and looking for grants and scholarships
3. But just as important as the issue of vocation and training, and quite frankly, an even more *noble* object of ambition, is the question; "How can I be *good*?"
 - a. not at some sport or skill
 - b. but good in character
4. Being good requires present preparation as surely as one's future career
5. The young face unique challenges because as they emerge from childhood into adults, they are faced with myriad new temptations and options
6. They usually *don't* possess the experience to handle them
7. A young, new bank president had only been on the job for a week when he felt overwhelmed
 - a. he called the previous president whose job he had inherited when he retired
 - b. the young man asked, "What was the secret of your success as president of this bank?"
 - c. the older man replied, "Smart choices."

- d. the younger asked, "How do I make smart choices?"
 - e. "Wisdom," was the reply
 - f. "Okay, how do I gain wisdom," asked the new president a bit exasperated?
 - g. "Dumb choices," said the older man as he hung up
8. While we certainly should learn from our mistakes - this isn't the *only* way we can learn, nor is it the *preferred* way
 9. The psalmist asks, "How can a young man cleanse his way?"
 10. The answer comes, "By taking heed according to Your word."
 11. Young person - do you have a plan for your life?
 - a. not just your college and career
 - b. but for your character!
 - c. as you ask yourself what you want to do when you grow up, have you also asked an even more important question - What KIND of person do you want to be when you grow up."
 - d. that future is built on today
 - e. you cannot live life carelessly today and think that one day, sometime after your 35th birthday, once you've had all the "fun" you want to have, you will then get serious about God
 - f. what you will be when you are 35 is what you are choosing to be today
 12. My younger brother and sister, do you have a plan for your life?
 13. Of have you left your life to the winds of fortune and whatever fashions direct and drive the world?
 14. You are faced with a daily barrage of filth and temptation
 - a. from MTV & VH-1
 - b. to the radio and movies
 - c. from school to your friends
 15. If you don't have a plan for how you will be *good*, then you have a plan to *fail*
 16. Innocence is a precious gift!
 - a. but it is sadly undervalued by many and sold cheaply for some passing thrill
 - b. if you adults agree with what I am about to say, then let the young people know by saying "Amen."
 - c. many of us who are a bit older, deeply regret the loss of our innocence and would give much to get it back
 17. So, how can you cleanse your way? How can you make your path into maturity clean and good?
 18. By *taking heed* to God's word
 - a. the *best made* road needs looking after
 - b. the *good* highway has to be maintained
 - c. recently around VC we've seen the railroads out doing major maintenance on the tracks
 - 1) they have all kinds of elaborate and special equipment
 - 2) and the rail companies have invested millions of dollars in new ties and spikes and plates and rails
 - 3) all so that the trains might run safely and on time
 - d. in Jerusalem, in the Old City, there is a portion of the old Roman

- thoroughfare that has been exposed
- 1) it's called the Cardo
 - 2) it was the main road in Jerusalem and was constructed at great expense
 - 3) it's stones are large marble blocks
 - 4) and in the time of Rome, the major shops of the city lined it's sides
 - 5) but today, it lies some 16 feet below the level of the modern city
 - 6) 16 feet of dirt and rubble covered it till revealed in recent years by excavation
 - 7) and its stones, which once fit together in precision, are now broken, scarred, and uneven
- e. the only way we can keep our *way* clean is by *taking heed* to it
- 1) by taking time to maintain it
 - 2) by putting effort into it
 - 3) some Christians put more effort into their *physical* condition than they do their *spiritual* condition
 - 4) they will spend 45 minutes on a treadmill or an hour at the gym, but they cannot find 10 minutes to read and pray
- f. we take heed to our lawns and houses - why not our moral lives?
- g. which is more important?
- h. question: if we maintained our house and yard with the same kind of diligence as our inner moral character, what would they look like?
- i. Proverbs 4:23 says

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

- j. negligence of the inner life leads surely to grief
19. The way we take heed to our hearts is to give diligence to God's word
20. God's Word is the guard
- a. conscience is *not* sufficient to itself
 - b. conscience merely tells us what is right is *right* and what is wrong is *wrong*
 - c. but how will we know what is right and wrong?
 - d. God's Word tells us!
21. When I put on the watch I got in Russia a few years ago, because it is a wind-up, I always have to re-set it
- a. so I look at the clock next to my bed and set my watch by that
 - b. but the other night, the power went off in our neighborhood for a couple hours and the clock shut down
 - c. to get the correct time for the clock, I checked my Timex watch which runs by a battery
 - d. but you know what - after I put a new battery in that watch a few months ago, I set it by that clock next to my bed
 - e. if I want the real time - the correct time - I have to call time, which is corrected according to the standard of Greenwich Mean time
22. Most people today set their moral compass by looking at what is accepted by those around them
- a. while some govern their lives by what's *acceptable* --
 - b. a few others live their lives by what's *permissible*, what they can get away with

- c. but over time, the line between acceptable and permissible moves, usually in the direction of more immoral behavior
- 23. Our conscience, that little voice that tells us what is right and what is wrong cannot be informed by the world because the world changes
- 24. It has to be informed by the unchanging standard of God's Word
- 25. The bible tells us that when people reject God, they get to the place where evil is called good, and good is called evil
 - a. well, we are there!
 - b. have you listened to any of the impeachment hearings this week?
 - c. I had jury duty on Thursday
 - 1) got called up to a courtroom to select a panel for a trial
 - 2) at the very outset, they had all 45 of us stand and take an oath of truthfulness
 - 3) part of the oath includes the warning against perjury
 - 4) if a juror, a lonely, little juror, mis-represents him or herself, they are subject to criminal prosecution!
 - d. but now we are being told that the highest office in the land is under a different set of rules
 - 1) perjury is dismissable
 - 2) it isn't that important
 - 3) we should just overlook it and move on
 - e. we need to wake up and realize something is very tweaked in our national soul when these things don't matter any more
- 26. We should cultivate the habit early in life, of setting our lives alongside the Word of God so it's light might shine on our choices and behavior and reveal their shape
- 27. We should not set our lives alongside the cast of ER or Home Improvement
 - a. we should not set our selves next to the participants of the Jerry Springer show
 - b. we must illumine our lives by God's Word

B. V. 11

Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

1. If v. 9 was for the young, this verse speaks to all
2. And what it says is that if we would make our way clean, if we would walk in holiness and purity before God, then there has to be some depth to our lives
3. There must be a depth of relationship with God that others do not see - something hidden that is the deepest part of who and what we are
4. Religion that is all show and no substance is religion that will lead to shame and embarrassment
5. It's only as we take God's word into our inmost being and treasure it in our hearts that we develop depth
6. And it is only when we have depth that we can bear the fruit of righteousness
7. The fruit of the Spirit does not come from shallow roots
8. One my first trip to Russia, things were still pretty tough and many stores had mostly empty shelves

- a. but several of these stores put displays in their windows of boxes and cans
 - b. thinking they had products, people would enter to find just a few unwanted items scattered on the otherwise bare shelves
 - c. it turns out the boxes and cans in the windows were empty
9. Some people's religion is like that - window dressing - but their hearts are bare!
 10. Like a building, if we would go up - we must first go down and lay a solid foundation
 - a. the length of our spiritual lives is determined by their breadth
 - b. if we would be pure and righteous, we must hide God's word in our hearts
 11. Today, we think of the heart as the seat of affection and emotion, but the ancients thought of it in a much more fundamental sense - it was the center of the personal self
 12. That's why we read in Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

13. When the psalmist says he had hidden God's word in his heart, he is saying he has buried it in the very core of His being
14. He's dug it into the soil from which the tree of his life springs
15. The hiding of God's word is more than an occasional and casual encounter with the Bible
 - a. it speaks of a careful and diligent plan
 - b. it pictures the process of committing it to memory
16. Over the years, I've talked with many a struggling Christian who is grieved that they can't find victory over some sin
 - a. inevitably as we talk, it becomes evident they are too casual in their attitudes toward God's Word
 - b. they want victory - but they want it cheaply
 - c. they don't want to take the time to invest their hearts with what they need to overcome
 - d. they want a spiritual panacea - someone to give them a shot - that will inject them with spiritual antibiotics that will fight the infection of sin
 - e. the means God has given for hiding His word in our hearts is to read, and pray, and meditate on His word - committing it to memory
17. As a young child, Jesus hid His Father's word in His heart so that when the devil came and faced Him with the 3 most powerful temptations every to be experienced by a human being, He was ready
 - a. He didn't need a concordance
 - b. He didn't whip out a pocket Franklin compu-bible and do a search on the word "bread"
 - c. He rebuffed the temptations with a stone hurled from a ready sling
 - 1) the stone was a *select* passage, perfect for answering the devil
 - 2) and the sling as a heart well filled with the word of God
18. If we would walk in obedience and purity, we must take time to hide God's word in our hearts - to memorize it and make it a part of our lives and living
19. D. L. Moody once said, "Sin will keep you from this Book or this Book will keep you from sin."

C. Vs. 15-16

{15} I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.

{16} I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

1. Here we see *how* it was that the psalmist had hidden God's word in his heart
2. He meditated on God's precepts and contemplated His ways
3. This word *meditate* means to fill the mind with something and to work it over and over
 - a. to ponder it
 - b. to turn it around and upside down and dig into the deepest recesses to find all that is there
4. Carl Sharsmith, was an 81 year old guide in Yosemite National Park.
 - a. he had been guiding tours of the park for half a century
 - b. one day a woman asked him a question by that disturbed him greatly
 - c. she said, "I've only got an hour to spend at Yosemite. What should I do? Where should I go?"
 - d. the old ranger finally found voice to reply.
 - e. "Ah, lady, only an hour." He repeated it slowly.
 - f. "I suppose that if I had only an hour to spend at Yosemite, I'd just walk over there by the river and sit down and cry."
 - g. a whole lifetime is not long enough to appreciate fully the beauty and learning and value of the Bible.
 - h. that's why we must take time to study its truths and make them real in our lives.
5. No time or place has had a greater abundance of Bibles than Modern America
 - a. that makes it all the more shocking to realize how appallingly *low* bible knowledge is among Americans
 - b. a few years ago, a test of Bible knowledge was given to five classes of high school seniors.
 - 1) most of them failed the exam completely!
 - 2) some were so confused that they thought Sodom and Gomorrah were *lovers*,
 - 3) or that the gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, *Luther*, and John.
 - 4) others said that Eve was created from an apple,
 - 5) and that the stories Jesus used in teaching were called *parodies*.
 - 6) more than 80 percent of the pupils could not complete such familiar quotations as "Many are called but few are (chosen)"; or "a soft answer turns away (wrath)."
 - c. yet research tells us the average America home has 3 bibles
 - d. what are people doing with them, because they certainly aren't reading them!
6. And most tragic of all, and probably why people have stopped reading them on their own is -- few people bring their bibles to church anymore
 - a. was a time when everyone brought their bible to church
 - b. but now, many churches have shifted from sermons based in bible study to "spiritual talks"
 - c. sermonettes for Christianettes

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- d. I trust you bring your bible to church
 - e. please, if you haven't been bringing it, do
 - f. and look up the passages we are studying
 - g. if you don't know your way around the bible, ask your neighbor to help you find it
 - h. if it turns out neither of you know where to look, have a good laugh and find someone who does
 - i. take your bible with you to work and read it at break and lunch
 - j. read it in the morning over breakfast, or while brushing your teeth
 - k. you might be able to cover only a few verses, but then think about them throughout the day
 - l. that's what it means to meditate and contemplate
 - 1) to fill the mind with something and then work it over
 - 2) like you'd chew a good piece of prime rib until you've sucked out the last of the juice
 - 3) and put it into a form that can be digested and made a part of your very being
7. Notice what the psalmist said he would meditate *on*: The Lord's *precepts*
- a. a precept is a *principle*
 - b. as you read and meditate on God's word, look for the *principles* it reveals
 - c. God's word does not contain specific instructions for every possible detail of human existence - that would require thousands of volumes
 - d. in scripture, we find precepts and principles that govern all of life
 - e. a good part of meditating on God's word is the process of discovering these principles and then applying them to our lives
8. V. 16 . . .

{16} I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

- 8. Do you love God's word?
- 9. What we delight in is the thing we keep ever before us -
 - a. we don't forget it
 - b. it brings light and life to our world
- 10. Ever seen grandparents who delight in their grandchildren?
 - a. they live for those kids
 - b. they have pictures you are sure to have to see
 - c. they are always buying presents
 - d. they plan their vacations around their grandchildren's vacations and major events
 - e. they talk about them non-stop
 - f. they have a bumper sticker on their RV that says, "Ask me about my Grandchildren"
- 11. Many years ago - after seeing the first Star Wars movie - it's all I talked about for weeks
 - a. it was my delight!
 - b. I think I saw it 5 times in the first 4 weeks!
 - c. even to this day - I still am pretty stoked about it

- d. am looking forward to the prequel in May
12. But even more - I love and delight in God's Word!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Do You?

1. Do you love God's word? Is it your chief delight?
2. If not, ask the Lord to give you a love for it, a hunger for it
3. A man in Kansas City was severely injured in an explosion.
 - a. his face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands.
 - b. he was just a new Christian, and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible.
 - c. then he heard about a lady in England who read braille with her lips.
 - d. hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in braille.
 - e. to his dismay, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion.
 - f. one day, as he brought one of the braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised characters and he could feel them.
 - g. he's since, "read" through the entire Bible four times!
4. There's no doubt this man knows what it is to delight in the word of God

B. Determination

1. Note carefully the psalmist's determination to delight in God's word

I will delight myself in Your statutes.

2. Each of us can determine the course and object of our affections
3. We do this by releasing them toward something
4. We can *choose* to develop a delight in God and His word
5. I have seen this take place in the lives of many of you in this room
 - a. your love for the Word has grown over the years
 - b. and today - *it is* your delight
 - c. that delight has turned to a rich harvest of good things as you seek the Lord

C. Love Letter

1. When Elizabeth Barrett became the wife of Robert Browning, her parents disowned her because they disapproved of the marriage.
2. The daughter, however, wrote almost every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for a reconciliation.
3. After 10 years she received a huge box in the mail that contained all the notes she had sent.
 - a. not one had been opened!
 - b. although these "love letters" have become an invaluable part of classical English literature, it's really pathetic to think that they were never read by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's parents.
 - c. had they looked at just one, the broken relationship with their daughter

might have been healed.

4. All of us are alienated from God because of sin.
5. But He has provided a way of reconciliation.
6. The Bible tells all about it, and also expresses His earnest longing for fellowship with us.
7. It is God's love letter to the human race
8. How sad that there are so many who will never read it but send it back unopened
9. How about you?