



*Sweeter
than
Honey*

D E V O T I O N A L 3



CHRIST
CHURCH

Psalm 119:33-64

HE

³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
³⁴ Give me understanding,
that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!
³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking
at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.
³⁸ Confirm to your servant your promise,
that you may be feared.
³⁹ Turn away the reproach that I dread,
for your rules are good.
⁴⁰ Behold, I long for your precepts;
in your righteousness give me life!

WAW

⁴¹ Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
your salvation according to your promise;
⁴² then shall I have an answer for him
who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.
⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly
out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your rules.
⁴⁴ I will keep your law continually,
forever and ever,
⁴⁵ and I shall walk in a wide place,
for I have sought your precepts.
⁴⁶ I will also speak of your testimonies before
kings and shall not be put to shame,
⁴⁷ for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands toward your
commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.

ZAYIN

⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant,
in which you have made me hope.
⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction,
that your promise gives me life.
⁵¹ The insolent utterly deride me,
but I do not turn away from your law.
⁵² When I think of your rules from of old,
I take comfort, O Lord.
⁵³ Hot indignation seizes me
because of the wicked,
who forsake your law.
⁵⁴ Your statutes have been my songs
in the house of my sojourning.
⁵⁵ I remember your name in the night, O Lord,
and keep your law.
⁵⁶ This blessing has fallen to me,
that I have kept your precepts.

HETH

⁵⁷ The Lord is my portion;
I promise to keep your words.
⁵⁸ I entreat your favor with all my heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.
⁵⁹ When I think on my ways,
I turn my feet to your testimonies;
⁶⁰ I hasten and do not delay
to keep your commandments.
⁶¹ Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
⁶² At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous rules.
⁶³ I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
⁶⁴ The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes!

Day 1

PSALM 119:33-40

HE

- ³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
- ³⁴ Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
- ³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
- ³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!
- ³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.
- ³⁸ Confirm to your servant your promise,
that you may be feared.
- ³⁹ Turn away the reproach that I dread,
for your rules are good.
- ⁴⁰ Behold, I long for your precepts;
in your righteousness give me life!

Pastor Andrew recently used a favorite musical to remind us that “starting at the beginning is a very good place to start.” The writer of this psalm understood that there is an order to life that can’t be ignored; you can’t get to B and C if you bypass A. Proverbs, a wisdom book, states this in the first chapter. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

The writer of this long psalm started at the beginning. He still needs wisdom for living life each day, but he is not searching for a source. The Word of God is his life manual. His honest requests express confidence in a covenant God.

Sometimes we are frustrated or disappointed as we try to make wise decisions because we are expecting the wrong thing. Clearing the playing field of misguided assumptions might help.

- Wisdom is not automatically conferred when someone becomes a believer. God sometimes acts miraculously, but not magically. Even Jesus grew in wisdom, demonstrating this is how God intended human life to work. No one expects a first-grader to understand trigonometry. Nature shows us the same truth; a little green apple is all it is supposed to be in June. This means becoming wise requires patience, trusting God’s timing. The instant gratification our culture demands aborts wisdom; it has no chance to develop. However, just growing older does not guarantee we will become wise. Fear-of-the-Lord is the non-negotiable beginning.

- Wisdom is not the same thing as knowledge, although knowledge is a prerequisite. As every plumber, actuary, pilot, or doctor needs a thorough knowledge of their field, so believers cannot live wisely without knowing what God has told us. But what God has told us is for living and for loving, not just for knowing.
- Wisdom does not mean knowing exactly what to say or do in every situation. This expectation would make us moralists or legalists, looking for a risk-free way to live that would protect us from being wrong or humbled. Wisdom is more about discerning what is from God and what is from the world, the flesh, or the devil. James wrote that bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are indicators of the latter. Meekness, mercy, sincerity, and purity reflect wisdom coming from above. (James 3:13-18)
- Human wisdom has its place; it too is a gift of common grace that can make the world a better place to live. But the wisdom that leads to Life is only in Christ and comes to us through the Holy Spirit. A brilliant, clever mind can't comprehend this wisdom without a new birth. Human wisdom empties the cross of its power. (1 Corinthians 1, 2)

You can tell that this song/prayer is an expression of someone enthralled, someone in love with God and his Word. It is a love song. Lovers often express the same things over and over in slightly different words. They aren't worried about sounding logical or redundant. Their words are flowing out of their full hearts, out of the joy of loving and being loved. Jesus loved to sing these songs with everyone who shared his love for his Father. We sing with him!

Prayer

Loving Father, we are the simple people made wise by following you. We want you to keep teaching us, keep wooing us, keep turning us from worthless things to the life that is in you. We love you, Lord, and we lift our voices to worship you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 2

PSALM 119:41-48

WAW

- ⁴¹ Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
your salvation according to your promise;
⁴² then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.
⁴³ And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your rules.
⁴⁴ I will keep your law continually,
forever and ever,
⁴⁵ and I shall walk in a wide place,
for I have sought your precepts.
⁴⁶ I will also speak of your testimonies before
kings and shall not be put to shame,
⁴⁷ for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.
⁴⁸ I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.

The Psalmist has hope in the laws of God. In the boundaries that God has set up within which we are to live. Yet we see that the boundaries are not a narrow way of tight containment. But God's law gives birth to freedom. The Psalmist rejoices in the wide place in which he will walk due to the keeping of the law.

A motto that some carry throughout life is, 'discipline is freedom' and in many ways this is true. When we conduct our lives according to a set of rules and standards there is a certain ease that it brings as we encounter the currents of the world. When we are reckless and haphazard about the way in which we live, we lose sight of who we are, what we are living for, and our place in this world; it is easy to drown. When we are rooted in a standard, the waves of the world around us have a harder time of shaking us.

When we are rooted in God's word, in his law for our lives, when we are nourished by the living word we have life that none can take from us. Those roots go deep; to the one who created us and sustains us.

In the royal courts of this world, in the public forums, we witness to who God is and his promised salvation by the word he has given us and by the lives we lead according to it. Many may mock us, many may attack us, but we have an answer. We know the standard by which to live. We know we have fallen short of it. We know the one who has fulfilled it.

As children we often push against and test the boundaries that our parents set for us. Searching for where the limit lies. And just as often we cross those boundaries unintentionally, falling short of the mark. But as parents we do not give up on our children out of futility or punish them beyond what is necessary. Seeking to give them order, protection, and a standard by which to live we protect them from what we can. We often sacrifice of ourselves to bring them up to flourish on their own.

While keeping the rules of our parents is usually an accomplishable task we are incapable of living up to God's holy standard. Even as we study it we are rebuked and humbled by the holiness of God. As we seek to live according to God's word, for it to be the nourishment of our lives, we can rejoice even in our shortcomings. Because we have that promised salvation. We have that hope toward which all of God's word points.

Jesus Christ spoke before rulers, he showed us how to respond with the word to the devil's attacks. In God's steadfast love and kindness he has given us a free gift. And not only did our Lord and King die for us and redeem us but he sent us a Helper, the Holy Spirit who inspired all of scripture on which we meditate.

As you come to God's word, come expectantly. When you come to worship, come expectantly. When you come to prayer, come expectantly. Knowing that the Holy Spirit lives in us and has brought us into faith. As God breathed life into the first man, so he breathes life into scripture that it is nourishing for us and not a dead law or a driving rod.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, give us life. As bread and wine feed our bodies nourish our souls with the Word. As we come to your word, O God, teach us your ways, may we delight in the path you have paved for us. As the world seeks to shame and taunt us, secure us in the only hope that we have in Christ. Amen.

Day 3

PSALM 119:49-56

ZAYIN

- ⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant,
in which you have made me hope.
- ⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my affliction,
that your promise gives me life.
- ⁵¹ The insolent utterly deride me,
but I do not turn away from your law.
- ⁵² When I think of your rules from of old,
I take comfort, O Lord.
- ⁵³ Hot indignation seizes me
because of the wicked,
who forsake your law.
- ⁵⁴ Your statutes have been my songs
in the house of my sojourning.
- ⁵⁵ I remember your name in the night, O Lord,
and keep your law.
- ⁵⁶ This blessing has fallen to me,
that I have kept your precepts.

It's been said that the Word of God is like a Swiss Army knife—a versatile tool for help with most anything. In Zayin, the sixth Hebrew letter, the psalmist expresses this sentiment in eight short statements. It bubbles up feelings of hope, comfort, security, direction, belonging, refuge, purpose, and blessing, to name a few.

What do you look to the Bible for the most? Do you look to it for comfort? Refuge? Truth?

Certainly the Bible *provides* comfort, refuge, hope, and purpose, but should we be looking for these things or looking for Jesus? The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. Throughout the Scriptures, we see many of these very expressions come to life in the mini-stories that are told through its pages. For instance, after Nathan the prophet confronts David of his sin against Bathsheba and God, he writes Psalm 51. We see David looking to God for mercy (v. 1), wisdom (v. 6), forgiveness (v. 7), and direction (v. 15) through a story and through the Word of God.

Or take Peter's story, distraught after his denial of Jesus, the Word made flesh—Jesus—provides for him direction, belonging, purpose, community, and comfort (John 21). The God of the Word tells us how the Word of God meets us in our day and in our way. Maybe you find yourself asking, *How can I become like the psalmist in Psalm 119? So reliant on the Bible, so enthralled by what it says and provides?* In short, we read our Bibles. We bring our life to the

God of the Word by soaking in the Word of God. Come to it not assuming you know what it says, but approach it as an unfolding of a good story with so much truth in it. Jesus's ministry was saturated by this approach. At a young age, he sat at the feet of teachers in the temple (Luke 2). He answered public questions with allusions or quotes from the Hebrew Bible (see Luke 4:4, 8, 12). He opened his ministry by reading from its pages (Luke 4:16-21). He clarified the meaning of the Hebrew Bible to the people of the day (Matthew 5-7). He saturated himself with the Word.

What do you look to the Bible for most? What does your heart desire from the Scriptures? Today read Psalm 119:49-56 as a glimpse inside one person's mini-story about how the God of the Word has entered into his life. That same God comes to you today, inviting you into the story through His Word.

Prayer

Father, help me this day as I seek to find myself in the story you are telling. Unfolding before the cosmos is a story about truth, love, joy, justice, hope, comfort, peace, and so much more. Facilitated through the Holy Spirit, provided by your Son, Jesus Christ, your Word is more precious than gold, sweeter than honey, better for our soul than anything else. Give us eyes, hearts, and minds to plumb the depths of this great story. Lead us, Father. Through Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Day 4

PSALM 119:57-64

HETH

- ⁵⁷ The Lord is my portion;
I promise to keep your words.
- ⁵⁸ I entreat your favor with all my heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.
- ⁵⁹ When I think on my ways,
I turn my feet to your testimonies;
- ⁶⁰ I hasten and do not delay
to keep your commandments.
- ⁶¹ Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
- ⁶² At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous rules.
- ⁶³ I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
- ⁶⁴ The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes!

Every type of writing has its purpose. Journalism, mystery thriller, sci-fi, historical fiction, biblical commentary, etc. During my undergraduate engineering studies, there was a brutal introductory course on technical communication where we learned how to write clearly, concisely, and coherently. No flowery language was tolerated. This is important for engineering writing because the purpose is to present the bare-bones facts. The purpose of the writing shapes the style of the writing.

Poetry is no exception. If prose makes its appeal to the mind, then poetry makes its appeal to the heart. Poetry has a way of communicating beyond the literal words on the page. So how does this style relate to its purpose? One poet put it this way, “Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.”

Sure, the stylistic conventions of ancient Jewish writers are far different from what we are accustomed to. Nevertheless, remembering that the psalms are poetic opens up sweeping vistas to savor even to us modern readers.

That brings us to today’s stanza of Psalm 119. Read it again and ask yourself what poetic conventions the psalmist may be using!

“The Lord is my portion.” *Portion*. Those raised in the church may not give this word a second thought, but it is rarely used in broader society in this way. In modern English, *portion*—as in portion size for our beloved nutrition facts—implies limitation. This much is for you, no more no less. What happens if we apply that definition to understand this

description of God? Is God a stingy provider? If God is my (limited) portion, then could another portion at an all-you-can-eat buffet be bigger and better?

Considering other translations for the Hebrew word *heleq* helps us understand the nuance: inheritance, share of possession, share of booty. With this understanding, the simple statement, “The Lord is my portion” becomes a beautiful oxymoron.

So the psalmist sings, “The infinite, eternal, unchanging God himself is my portion—my possession! my inheritance!” Furthermore, he recognizes that this simple yet profound truth utterly changes the way he interacts with this sad and broken world. Somehow in the face of his own stubborn sin (verse 59), or the entrapments of his enemies (verse 61), or even the darkness of the night (verse 62), the psalmist makes his resolve and says, “I promise to keep your words.”

Why? Oftentimes comparing the bookends of Hebrew poetry illuminates its progression. “*The Lord is my portion*” becomes “*The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love.*” The psalm writer recognizes that his inheritance in God is far from “limited.” In fact, the whole earth is saturated with the unending covenantal love of God! The psalm writer began by saying, “*I promise to keep your words.*” At the end he says, “*teach me your statutes!*” He recognizes that there is a mysterious dual nature to our obedience to God. Even while the psalmist makes a real promise articulating his own resolve, in the same breath he confesses his need for God to teach him. Put another way, the psalmist confidently declares that he *will* abide in God’s words because he knows that God’s steadfast love gives him the confidence that indeed God will protect and uphold him all his days.

- How is God calling you to greater obedience to His Word today?
- How does the steadfast love of God empower you to walk in that?

Prayer

Father in heaven, you are our portion. What a simple yet profound truth! May that beautiful truth give me the contentment, joy, humility, and deep-seated resolve I need to abide in your Word. I know that it is your very loving care that makes this possible. Would you teach me the way of your Son, Jesus? For his sake we pray, Amen.

Day 5

PSALM 119:33-64

Here again are the four sections of Psalm 119 that we looked at this week. Read through and savor again a verse or two or three that really connected, convicted, or encouraged you.

HE

- ³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
and I will keep it to the end.
³⁴ Give me understanding,
that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for I delight in it.
³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!
³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking
at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.
³⁸ Confirm to your servant your promise,
that you may be feared.
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⁴⁶ I will also speak of your testimonies before
kings and shall not be put to shame,
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in which you have made me hope.
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⁶¹ Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
⁶² At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous rules.
⁶³ I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
⁶⁴ The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes!

As you contemplate the graciousness of a God who has initiated a relationship with you and made himself known through his Word, pray your own prayer of response.