



*Sweeter
than
Honey*

D E V O T I O N A L 7



CHRIST
CHURCH

Psalm 119:161–176

SIN AND SHIN

¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your words.

¹⁶² I rejoice at your word
like one who finds great spoil.

¹⁶³ I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.

¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous rules.

¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.

¹⁶⁶ I hope for your salvation, O Lord,
and I do your commandments.

¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸ I keep your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are before you.

TAW

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before you, O Lord;
give me understanding according to your word!

¹⁷⁰ Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word.

¹⁷¹ My lips will pour forth praise,
for you teach me your statutes.

¹⁷² My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.

¹⁷³ Let your hand be ready to help me,
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 praise you,
and let your rules help me.

¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.

Day 1

PSALM 119:121-123, 145-147, 153,154

¹²¹ I have done what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.

¹²² Give your servant a pledge of good;
let not the insolent oppress me.

¹²³ My eyes long for your salvation
and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise.

¹⁴⁵ With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O LORD!
I will keep your statutes.

¹⁴⁶ I call to you; save me,
that I may observe your testimonies.

¹⁴⁷ I rise before dawn and cry for help;
hope in your words.

¹⁵³ Look on my affliction and deliver me,
for I do not forget your law.

¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause and redeem me;
give me life according to your promise!

We have spent the last few weeks discovering why the psalmist said God's Word is "sweeter than honey" (Ps.19:10; Ps.119:103). From Old Testament history, we know that just as gold symbolized what was purest, honey symbolized the highest delight. The Promised Land would flow with milk and honey. Even today, we call a high point of goodness and happiness a honeymoon. Saying God's Word is sweeter than honey is saying it is our highest good, our greatest treasure here.

We started by seeing this psalm as sweet because it reveals God's heart as he makes room for us to come to him with the reality of our experience without denying, minimizing, or apologizing—chewing on this reality in his presence until we come to truth. Such honest prayers expose the artificiality and superficiality of platitudes and positivity and of trying to be a perfect specimen for God's display. An honest heart is the only place God can work.

As we practiced meditating with the psalmist in this way, we began to experience the sweetness. We brought our withered souls and were revived; we brought our simple minds and came away with wisdom. We came with divided hearts—our desire to please both God and

people—and are being purified day by day by his truth. We are experiencing joy together as we work to put off selfish ways and walk in his right paths. On this last week in Psalm 119, we're invited to cry to God for justice. In our own lives and in the world around us, we see oppression, injustice, and inequity in small and very large ways. *Lord, why does wrong so often seem to win? Why do you allow oppressors to abuse the poor and powerless? Why are believers hated? Why don't you intervene, Lord? Why?*

Being created in God's image means we know justice matters. "That's not fair!" comes naturally to a child. An existential philosopher may assert that there is no basis for calling anything wrong, but when his daughter is violated, he knows it is wrong. Job told his self-righteous friends he was confident God would vindicate him if only he could get a hearing. He knew justice mattered because **God is just!**

Like Job, the psalmist is not claiming perfection, but a covenant relationship with God. As his sons and daughters, we come boldly because we are coming to the throne of grace. We cry to God because we have a real enemy. We cry because injustice is real, hurtful, and destructive. We cry because God loves justice, and even now is making all things right and new.

Can we each pray the petitions above, filling in names and situations we know?

Can we pray boldly in the confidence God is just and has invited us to join him in bringing justice to our individual and collective places?

Can we imagine how Jesus prayed this psalm?

We can come in his name.

Day 2

PSALM 119:149, 159

¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice according to your steadfast love;
O Lord, according to your justice give me life.

¹⁵⁹ Consider how I love your precepts!
Give me life according to your steadfast love.

The connection between love and justice does not always seem apparent in modern conversations about justice. Current conversations seem more about demanding rights or retribution than having anything to do with love. How should Jesus-followers be thinking about the connection between love and justice?

That there is a connection is apparent from the verses in focus for today from Psalm 119. Here, by observing the parallelism employed in Hebrew poetry, we see in verse 149 that the psalmist cries to God both “according to his steadfast love (*hesed*)” and “according to his justice.” Steadfast love and justice are two sides of the same coin for the psalmist desperate to know God. Similarly in comparing verse 149 with 159, we see that justice and steadfast love are both instrumental in “giving life.” So what are we to make of this connection?

While there are other things that could be said, understanding the connection between covenant-keeping, self-giving love and justice throws a sharp light on what it means to long for justice. Justice, whether interpersonally or in the public square, needs to be laced with love. Love for our fellow humans who either are in need of justice or have transgressed just boundaries. Love for the Word of God that helps us understand the boundaries that help us live in a “wide place.” And especially love for God, our great sovereign, who out of love has created a world for justice and who has satisfied those same just demands out of his great love on our behalf.

There is no question that maintaining this connection is a challenge. It is only by being powered by the steadfast love of the Lord that we have any hope to mingle love and justice. But the great promise is that with Christ as our foundation, we can do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (see Micah 6:8). After all, justice, mercy, and humility are what we see when we gaze upon the cross!

Prayer

Father, you whose heart is steadfast love and justice, fill our hearts today with these great truths. May we be a people whose inclinations toward justice are laced with love and in loving well may we always be just. Thank you for making a way for us to live this reality through the cross. Holy Spirit, we know that loving justly will not be natural. Empower us today and in the days to come with your presence. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 3

PSALM 119:161-168

SIN AND SHIN

¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your words.

¹⁶² I rejoice at your word
like one who finds great spoil.

¹⁶³ I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.

¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous rules.

¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.

¹⁶⁶ I hope for your salvation, O Lord,
and I do your commandments.

¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.

¹⁶⁸ I keep your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are before you.

What do you do repeatedly throughout the day? Check the news? Scroll through social media? Supposedly Americans pick up their phones an average of 58 times per day!

The psalmist says that he praises the Lord for his righteous rules seven times a day! Seven is the biblical number of perfection or wholeness. Therefore, in modern English we could reasonably rephrase this as, “All the day long I praise you for your righteous rules.” This experience of lived worship starts with the psalmist’s commitment to reflection on the Word of God. The Hebrew phrase translated as “righteous rules” (*tsedeq mishpete*) could reasonably be translated as “righteous justice.” The laws of God are not merely rules, but are the rules through which the very character of God in his righteousness and justice are revealed.

Yet this experience is not simply a cognitive exercise where the beauty of God’s Word is only accessible to the literary connoisseur. No! We have been reminded throughout this extended reflection on Psalm 119 that we meet the God of the Word through the Word of God. For God’s Word is God’s heart revealed to his people. The psalmist has a Godward perspective (v. 161), a great treasure that rejoices his heart (v. 162), justice as his true compass (v. 163), great peace amid hardship (v. 165), hope for salvation (v. 166), grounding for his soul (v. 167), and purity of his ways (v. 168)--all because the psalmist is able to meet the God of the Word through his faithful reflection upon the Scriptures.

Finally, this stanza is centered on a singular climactic result. As the psalmist walks in accordance with the Lord’s commandments, his heart is enlivened to worship. In his meditations, he regularly finds it so beautiful in perfect righteousness and wisdom that from time to time he bursts out in praise. In his commentary on the Psalms, John Calvin describes the content of the psalmist’s worship in this way:

“It was not simply admiration which constrained him to this commendation, but a principle of gratitude; for he saw that nothing more excellent could be bestowed upon men than their being renewed to a blessed and an endless life by the incorruptible seed of heavenly truth.”

- What can you do today to intentionally shape your daily routine by admiration and gratitude for God’s Word?
- What truths about God ring out in your heart and enliven you to worship today?

Prayer

Father in heaven, thank you for your divine truth. We live in a rebellious world that has its heart set against you; so many scornfully reject your Word and your ways. We confess that without the merciful intervention of Christ’s death and resurrection, we would have hell-bent hearts as well. O God, draw our hearts near to you today. Help us to drink deeply from your Word, for we know it not only teaches us the ways of your justice, but it enlivens us to a joy-filled worshipful obedience to it. It is for your glory that we ask, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Day 4

PSALM 119:169-176

TAW

- ¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before you, O Lord;
give me understanding according to your word!
- ¹⁷⁰ Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word.
- ¹⁷¹ My lips will pour forth praise,
for you teach me your statutes.
- ¹⁷² My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.
- ¹⁷³ Let your hand be ready to help me,
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 praise you,
and let your rules help me.
- ¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.

For several weeks now, we have been learning from Psalm 119 how important the Word of God is.

The word is sweet nourishment.

It is the path. It even lights the way.

It is full of promises. It gives us joy and delight.

It helps to deliver us from oppression, and it comforts us in the midst of affliction.

The Word is a secure resting place in the storms of life.

It provides wealth that exceeds anything we can attain in a whole lifetime of work.

It is a place for our thought lives.

It is where we learn about God's love for us.

It gives us wisdom and understanding.

It helps us understand God, ourselves, and the world we encounter daily.

It teaches how to guard our lives against evil. It is an antidote for sin.

It is full of answers for all the questions life brings our ways. In fact, it gives us life.

It teaches us hope.

It enlarges our hearts.

It gives us appropriate boundaries.

In a world full of lies, the Word gives us truth we can believe without hesitation.

The Word is a place to dwell and delight in God.

Wow!! What an amazing list from Psalm 119, and it is by no means exhaustive. Now we have to ask ourselves how this list stacks up with our efforts to make the Word a major part of our lives. Is there anything in our lives that can be more beneficial? Is there anything we can read or study that can help us more? The Word shapes our minds and hearts. It is the key thing we do in building and maintaining our relationship with God.

We all need a personal plan that will keep us in the Word. Fortunately, there are many Bible-reading plans available to us. Just Google “Bible reading plans.” If you find that a particular plan doesn’t work for you, find one that does. Like the old Nike ad says, “Just Do It.”

As I write this, it occurs to me that we ought to have a Bible cover that looks like a bone, as in Eugene Peterson’s image from *Eat This Book*. Then every time we come to the Word, we’ll be reminded of what we need to do with it.

Prayer

Father, we all know how important your Word is to us. But we don’t always apply that truth to our decisions to read and study it. Help us to bring ourselves to your Word. Help us to gnaw on it like a dog gnaws on a bone. Help us to dwell in it, so that it can shape us and make us into the people you want us to be. Amen.

Day 5

PSALM 119:161-176

Here again are the two 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.

SIN AND SHIN

¹⁶¹ Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your words.
¹⁶² I rejoice at your word
like one who finds great spoil.
¹⁶³ I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love your law.
¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous rules.
¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.
¹⁶⁶ I hope for your salvation, O Lord,
and I do your commandments.
¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.
¹⁶⁸ I keep your precepts and testimonies,
for all my ways are before you.

TAW

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before you, O Lord;
give me understanding according to your word!
¹⁷⁰ Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your word.
¹⁷¹ My lips will pour forth praise,
for you teach me your statutes.
¹⁷² My tongue will sing of your word,
for all your commandments are right.
¹⁷³ Let your hand be ready to help me,
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 praise you,
and let your rules help me.
¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments.

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.