

## The Heart Condition Psalm 119:1-8

### Intro:

This summer we will be working through the first 88 verses of **Psalm 119**. The psalms are always a feast for the dry soul but **Psalm 119** is one of those rare psalms that not only looks delicious but it actually tastes better than it looks. It usually sticks out in people's minds because it is the longest of the psalms, 176 verses. It is actually the longest chapter in the Bible. It is ironic that the longest chapter in the Bible is on the Bible. As you read **Psalm 119** you will notice it is laser focused on the theme of the word of God.

**But there are other unique attributes of Psalm 119.** It contains 22 eight-verse stanzas. Each stanza represents a letter of the Hebrew alphabet with each of the eight lines in each stanza beginning with that Hebrew letter. For example, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is *aleph* and so each of the eight lines of the first stanza begins with the letter *aleph*. Each line of each stanza is a description of the majesty of the word of God. Note: the English translation does not begin with successive letters but instead is identified by the corresponding Hebrew letter at the beginning of each stanza.

**Psalm 119 is quite amazing to behold and, honestly, intimidating to preach.** The great 4<sup>th</sup> century pastor and scholar, Saint Augustine was asked why he had never preached a sermon on **Psalm 119** and he replied, *"As often as I began to reflect upon it, it always exceeded the utmost stretch of my powers. For in proportion it [seemed] more open, [but] so much the more deep [as I studied it]; so that I cannot show how deep it is."*<sup>1</sup> If Augustine said this about **Psalm 119**, you can bet I approach the psalm with special care and concern.

**The great Baptist Pastor and preacher, Charles Spurgeon calls Psalm 119 the golden alphabet.** In his commentary on the Psalms called *The Treasury of David*, he devoted 349 pages to **Psalm 119**, which is basically a book all in itself. **The 17<sup>th</sup> century pastor Charles Bridges** wrote a sermon on each of the 22 stanzas and when he had finished he compiled a 481-page book.

Essentially **Psalm 119** is a poem on the consuming delights of God's word. You might say it is a poem that is on the delights of God's word from A to Z. It helps us taste and see the delights of the word of God.

**Another unique attribute of Psalm 119 is the use of synonyms for Scripture.** There are at least eight synonyms for Scripture. Some Jewish rabbis says there are ten so that it correlates with the Ten Commandments but there are eight that we can easily identified: "**law**" (*torah*), occurs twenty-five times; "**word**" (*dabar*), twenty-four times; "**rulings**" or "**ordinances**" (*mispatim*), twenty-three times; "**testimonies**" (*hedot*), twenty-three times; "**commandments**" (*miswoth*), twenty-two times; "decrees" or "statues" (*huqqim*), twenty-one times; "precepts" or "charges" (*piqqudim*), twenty-one times; and "**sayings**," "**promise**," or "**word**" (*'imra*), nineteen times. **As you read through Psalm 119** over the summer give special attention to the synonyms for the Scripture. Try to underline or circle each one you find in your Bible.

**We do not know who wrote Psalm 119.** The psalm is anonymous. Yet regardless of who wrote it he had a deep devotion to the word of God and the gift of poetry. So it may have been King David but we are not sure. One thing is clear, the author also understood the affects of the word of God on the sinner's heart. When you read it you will notice the clear connection between the word of God and its affect on heart of sinners. This is especially clear in the first 88 verses.

**Finally, by way of introduction, I want to point out** that Psalm 119's emphasis on the word of God is not treated in an academic style but instead is addressed as worship. The psalmist is expressing heart-felt fellowship with God through His word. God is to be loved and enjoyed through His word, which is God's way of communing with the our heart's by His Holy Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Hywel R. Jones, *Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of the Word*, 9. I added the brackets to help the congregation with the meaning of his statement.

Spurgeon says, "Prayer, praise, and all sorts of devotional acts and feelings gleam through the [verses] like sunlight through an olive grove. You are not only instructed but also influenced and helped to express holy emotion."<sup>2</sup>

As we begin to dig into Psalm 119, let me ask a question of ourselves: Are you ever concerned that you might not be able to obey God's word? I am. There are times in my life when I am tempted to sin and I pray, "Lord Jesus don't let me sin. Help me obey You. Keep me near your word. Protect me. Help me to be obedient because my joy and happiness in You depends on it." So I pray "Lord don't let me slip or stumble." However, when I pray a prayer like that I am not worried about losing my salvation. It is that I desire to be obedient to the Lord and keep His word. The psalmist felt the same way and wrote about the same things in Psalm 119. We will hear him say over and over in the psalm that he longs to obey God's word because he loves God not because he is afraid God might smack him or punish him or that he will lose his salvation. The psalmist delighted to obey the word of God. It was his joy, his happiness. With that said, let's jump into Psalm 119:1-8.

Here is the main point to this morning's sermon: The word of God must shape the condition of our hearts because our happiness in life depends on it.

### I. Happy is the person whose heart completely seeks God. (vv. 1-3)

<sup>1</sup> **Blessed** are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the **law** of the Lord! <sup>2</sup> **Blessed** are those who keep his **testimonies**, who seek him with their **whole heart**, <sup>3</sup> who also do no wrong, but walk in his **ways**!"

The Psalmist begins this Psalm with the blessed. This is the same word that Psalm 1 begins with and thus begins the whole Psalter. Psalm 1 says: "**Blessed** is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; <sup>2</sup> but his **delight** is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." Scholar Derek Kidner refers to Psalm 119 as "the full flowering of that 'delight' . . . in the Law of the Lord" which is described in Psalm 1. In other words, he is saying Psalm 119 unpacks and applies Psalm 1.

Jesus begins the first ten lines of the Sermon on the Mount with blessed (well the last line is *rejoice* and is a stronger word for *blessed*.) Matthew 5:3-12:

<sup>3</sup> "**Blessed** are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> "**Blessed** are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> "**Blessed** are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> "**Blessed** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

<sup>7</sup> "**Blessed** are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup> "**Blessed** are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

<sup>9</sup> "**Blessed** are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> "**Blessed** are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "**Blessed** are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

<sup>12</sup> **Rejoice** and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

We might also say that those who delight in the full flowering of the word of God in Psalm 119 see it applied in *The Sermon on the Mount*. Think about it, after Jesus applied God's word to the depths of the sinner's heart He concluded His sermon with this charge: "Everyone then who hears these **words** of mine and **does them** will be like a **wise man** who built his house on the **rock**."

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1104.

**So . . . what does the word blessed mean in Psalm 119 and why is it important?** There are two words for blessed in Hebrew one is *barak* and the other is *ashrie*. God is the only One who ever uses the Hebrew word *barak*. When God calls someone blessed it carries a different meaning and power than *ashrie*.

***Ashrie* is the form of *blessed* that is only ever used by humans.** These two words for blessed are different and used differently in the Old Testament. The word for *blessed* in vv. 1 & 2 means *happy* or *happiness*.

**So how does a person experience the blessedness or happiness that is mentioned in vv. 1-2? Verses 1-3** say it is by *walking in the law of the Lord, by keeping his testimonies, and by walking in the ways of the Lord*. Here is what I want you to realize this morning, our relationship to God and His word is not simply an academic or cold and dry exercises in the word of God. There are great delights and happiness to be enjoyed in God by being in His word. There are times of wonder as we marvel at the wisdom of God seen in His word. It is a beautiful thing as the word of God pushes us toward greater and greater happiness and holiness. It matters how you feel about the word of God. It really does.

The delight in the word of God is not simply an emotional high but works itself out in practical ways in our lives. It does it through conviction of sin and repentance. This is where the disquiets that cause conviction of sin from His word are met with delights and joys of repentance so that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. The more we press into the word of God the more it changes us from the heart.

Just as **Psalm 119** is laser focused on the beauty of the word of God it also aims the laser of the word of God at the sinner's heart. **Psalm 119** addresses the sinner's heart condition with the word of God.

If you were here when we went through Deuteronomy, you will remember the emphasis that Deuteronomy put on the condition of the heart. Yahweh was never concerned with mere external obedience but with the heart grasping the beauty of the word of God so that it ***changed the heart***.

**This is because the heart is the control center for man.** The heart must change and be made whole and the means by which it is made whole is the word of God. There is no power for transformation by our own works and even by our own word. The heart must be consumed with the word of God. When the heart is consumed the state of happiness begins to work itself in the heart and the utter destruction of the idols and the idol factory that is in the heart are consumed by the cleansing fire of the word of God. This is why Augustine writes in *Book 1 of his Confessions*, "*Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.*"

#### Application

**1. To seek God with your whole heart means to seek your happiness in Him through His word.** It means that we don't simply have head knowledge but from the heart we love God. For the Christian, this means at the very control center of our lives we make it the aim of our lives to love Christ and His word. It means your heart is undivided in its love for Jesus. **Psalm 119** is a love song for the word of God as it reveals His salvation to us in Christ. Our confidence in Christ rests in the fact that God's word is sure and dependable and cannot be broken.

**You may object here and wonder what if you have a broken heart?** An undivided heart and a broken heart are not the same thing. Your heart may be broken and you may grieve over your sin, cry because of the brokenness in your life and weep because you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death but this does not mean your heart is divided.

**The divided heart does not pursue its happiness in the word of God.** The divided heart claims to love God's word but then spends no time in God's word. The cares of the world have hold of the divided heart and the seed that is planted will not bear the fruit of joy and happiness.

Yet those who call Christ blessed because of the grace tasted in Him are on their way to having their hearts made whole. It is this heart that hopes in God through His word. He knows the blessing of the presence of God by His Holy Spirit even in the middle of sorrow and grief.

2. **The means of grace that God uses to heal ours hearts and transforms our lives is the Spirit of God taking the word of God and pushing it deep in our hearts.** If we are going to know the happiness of walking in God's ways then His word must be more than water passing through a pipe but must saturate our hearts. We must find ways to allow the word of God reach the dry places of our hearts. We must cry out to God to do what we cannot do—water the hard, dry soil of our hearts.

**In times of dryness of the heart, we must pray with King David,** *"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. <sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."*

Perhaps you are like me and enjoy hearing stories of past saints and how they benefited from pressing their lives into the word of God. I think stories give us excellent examples to follow. Nineteenth century British art critic, John Ruskin, was one of those saints. He was not a pastor or preacher but he grew up in a home that loved the word of God. As a child, his mother made him memorize large portions of the Bible as part of his education. Later in life he wrote of **Psalm 119**, *"It is strange that of all the pieces of the Bible my mother taught me, that which cost me the most to learn, and which was, to my childish mind, chiefly repulsive—the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm—has now become of all the most precious to me in its overflowing and glorious passion of the love for the Law of God."*<sup>3</sup>

Friends we are not all called to be preachers and pastors yet I am sure that we would all experience much more spiritual benefit if we simply got to know the word of God better. If we would only spend precious moments every day simply reading and praying the word of God we would be pursuing that which is of greatest value and makes us truly happy. Find ways to get God's word in your heart. For example, if you drive a lot then listen to an audio Bible. Get a Bible on your phone and read it when you have some down time, like sitting in the waiting room of the doctor's office.

## **II. Happy is the person whose heart is established in the word of God. (vv. 4-6)**

*"**You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.** <sup>5</sup> Oh that my ways **may be steadfast** in keeping your statutes!"*

Although we do not find the word **heart** in these verses, the connection between the *word God* and the *condition of heart* is there. It is unmistakable that the author is calling his readers to be established in the word from the *heart*. The word *diligently* is used 300 times in the Old Testament. It is most famously connected to **Deuteuronomy 6:5** where God says to the people of Israel, *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."* The word *might* is the same word for *diligently*. So when the Hebrews heard the word *diligently* they would think of **Deuteronomy 6:5**, the Great Commandment.

*Diligently* is a forceful word in Hebrew. **Verse 4 could be translated,** *"You have commanded your precepts to be kept mightily or strongly."* *Diligently* is not referring to physical strength but the strength of a heart that has been consumed by the word of God. The *diligent heart* has absolute, singularity of personal devotion to God.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *An Expositional Commentary: Psalms 107-150* (Vol. 3), 972-973.

Then in v. 5 we hear the deep longing and prayer of the psalmist. Here, in the middle of this stanza, the psalmist realizes his *heart* is **still not** what it ought to be. He has been writing about the importance of a *whole heart* toward God and being *diligent* about keeping the teachings of Scripture but all of a sudden he gives this heartfelt prayer confessing that he has still not arrived. While he may have a *broken heart*, he does not have a divided heart for his confession keeps him longing to be conformed to the word of God.

***The Apostle Paul says something similar in Romans 7:15-8:4 except he unpacks his thoughts in greater detail:***

*"For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup> So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. [Romans 8:1-4] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

**Application:** The heart that is happily established in the word of God may not be a perfect heart but longs to be perfect. It prays like the Apostle Paul does in Romans 7.

**Is this how you pray?** Do you long to be conformed to the word of God, the image of Christ as presented in the word of God? **The whole idea of being diligent and steadfast from the heart is to be intentional in how we are conformed to Christ.** So for example, if you praying that you will love your neighbor as God has called us to do are you being obedient to that word? You see it is not just a good feeling you are looking for when we read the word of God or to be excited about something **but** our sincere longing is to be changed into the image of Christ by Holy Spirit taking the word of God and obeying it. **The question is,** do you read and obey the word or are you like the man James spoke of who looked in the mirror and then walked away and did nothing to change?

### **III. Happy is the person whose heart is fixed on God and His word. (vv. 7-8)**

*"<sup>6</sup> Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your **commandments**. <sup>7</sup> I will praise you with an **upright heart**, when I learn your **righteous rules**. <sup>8</sup> I will keep your **statutes**; do not utterly forsake me!"*

In v. 6, we see the psalmist is happy because his attention is fixated on the word of God, therefore experiencing shame in his life is of no concern to him. The psalmist has obviously known the painful experience of shame and now he wants nothing to do with it. Sin brings shame and the good news is that when sin is finally removed the prospect of ever being shamed is gone so until then . . . fix your eyes on the word of God and obey it.

Next we see in v. 7 that the truly happy person is person who has taken time to invest in the word of God. It is happiness that overflows in praise of God. Yet is it not praise with the lips only but praise that overflows like lava from a volcano. The heart of the word of God has been deposited deep in the heart and now overflows and consumes every sin in its path.

**This is the heart has been changed by the word and is now upright.** The Hebrew word *upright* means *to go directly in the path that is set before you*. **Proverbs 3:6 is like the lava flowing from the volcano and it says,** “*In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*”

The *upright heart* is the heart that God has acted upon by His word and made it righteous, holy, and happy in Him and therefore the person pursues God through His word and obedience to that word. For the upright heart, holiness is happiness. The upright heart knows that excitement that spends itself singing and praising God but does not result in holy living is not worth much.

Which is why **v. 8** ends this stanza with a mixture of humble and happy resolve and dependence.<sup>4</sup> There is a measure of trembling in **v. 8**. The psalmist has made it his aim to obey the word of God but you can sense he is trembling at the concern that he may fail. He probably knows what Jeremiah knows, that the heart is exceedingly wicked, who can know it. Think about it: **The Apostle Peter did not know his own heart.** When Christ told His disciples that He was going to Jerusalem and would be crucified and they would forsake Him, Peter exclaimed that he would never forsake Christ—yet he did.

#### **Application:**

**So what are we to do?** We need to remember our hearts are still wicked. We need to remind ourselves that Christ defeated Satan by the obedience to the word of God. When temptation comes, we need to know the word and preach to our hearts all that Christ has done to make us holy and then be obedient to the revealed word of God. We need to remind ourselves of the urgent need for holiness.

**The danger for gospel-center believers is that we will tell ourselves that Jesus kept the Law for us so we do not have to.** The truth is Jesus did keep the Law for you but that does not mean you do not have to obey the word of God. Jesus did not obey so you would not have to obey God. He obeyed God so you could obey and He purchased the power for you to obey God. The good news is that when you disobey there is forgiveness in His name and for His glory. Christian, Christ’s obedience on your behalf did not cheapen the grace of God so that you do not have to obey but He intensified it and made that grace abundantly available so you can obey God. As John Bunyan said, “*Run, John, run, the Law commands but gives us neither feet nor hands. Better news the gospel brings, it bids us fly and gives us wings.*”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

I want to close our time this morning by drawing our attention back to **v. 6** and the place of shame in our lives. It is amazing how much sin we commit because we are trying to avoid shame. Furthermore, the sinful banner of pride flies right alongside shame. We will refuse to admit guilt or failure and sin at the risk of being shamed. Shame is a powerful motivator to sin. We will lie to ourselves, our spouses, our family, our friends, our co-workers, our bosses and almost anyone to avoid the painful experience of shame. We deny our sin and will not take responsibility for our sin at the risk of being shamed or having our pride crushed before a watching world.

There is only one way to know the happiness of no shame—fix your eyes on the true word of God—Jesus Christ and obey His word. We must preach to ourselves that on the cross, just as the *letter of Hebrews* says, He scorned the shame of taking our sin and dying on the cross, which was the most shameful way to die. He was stripped naked, beaten unmercifully and nailed to the cross because of our sin and shame. Yet He did not let the shame keep Him from obeying the command of God to go to the cross for us. Instead He kept His eyes fixed on the joy that was set before Him and the joy of redeeming you and me from our sin tasted so much sweeter than our shame that He bore our sin on the that tree.

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<sup>4</sup> Spurgeon, 1113.

<sup>5</sup> I don’t know where Bunyan said this but he did.

Brothers and sisters know the commands of God. Obey His word AND fix your eyes on Christ the fullness of the Word of God. It is as the old hymn says:

1. *When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,  
What a glory He sheds on our way!  
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,  
And with all who will trust and obey.*

○ *Refrain:*

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

2. *Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,  
But His smile quickly drives it away;  
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,  
Can abide while we trust and obey.*
3. *Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,  
But our toil He doth richly repay;  
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,  
But is blessed if we trust and obey.*
4. *But we never can prove the delights of His love  
Until all on the altar we lay;  
For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,  
Are for them who will trust and obey.*
5. *Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,  
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;  
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;  
Never fear, only trust and obey.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> [http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Trust\\_and\\_Obey/](http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Trust_and_Obey/).