

## **“Counsel for Young Lives”**

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Scriptural Foundation: Psalm 119:9-16, ESV

### **Beth**

- <sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By guarding it according to your word.
- <sup>10</sup> With my whole heart I seek you;  
let me not wander from your commandments!
- <sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart,  
that I might not sin against you.
- <sup>12</sup> Blessed are you, O LORD;  
teach me your statutes!
- <sup>13</sup> With my lips I declare  
all the rules of your mouth.
- <sup>14</sup> In the way of your testimonies I delight  
as much as in all riches.
- <sup>15</sup> I will meditate on your precepts  
and fix my eyes on your ways.
- <sup>16</sup> I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word.

Nothing is more important to a believer's progress than learning how to feed one's own soul with the Word of God. Nothing strengthens faith more than this. Nothing advances zeal for Jesus more than this. Nothing weakens sin, which has taken root, more than this. Nothing alerts us more to the temptations which abound around us. Nothing deepens our love for God more than this. Nothing sweetens our worship more than this. Nothing motivates sacrifice in living more than this. Nothing reveals God Himself more personally to us than this. Nothing fixes our hope on Jesus' return more than this. Nothing is more important to the believer's progress than learning how to feed one's own soul with the Word of God.

The Bible is God's bridge communicating Himself to us, yet many believers attend church every week and do not know how to open God's Word for themselves and to hear God's voice from it. Many believers, who perhaps know how to do that, do not embrace this opportunity daily in their lives. Both of these lead to tragic consequences for the individual and for the church of Jesus.

One of my professors who taught Greek New Testament classes urged us, as future pastors, to work hard at mining precious truth from the Bible in order we might give it out to God's people on a Sunday morning. I was very encouraged by this exhortation until he said, as one of his reasons and motivating factors, "Many people in church on Sunday morning, for many of them, your sermon will be the only hour of theological reflection they will have in their entire week." When I heard my professor say that, as a student preparing for ministry, I thought to myself, "Oh, Lord, please may this not be, for what a weak, powerless, immature church that would be. My one hour with people will not change their state even if I was able to give as potent and powerful a sermon as the Apostles Peter and Paul combined."

God has so much more for us than that and I trust Psalm 119 will encourage us to feed our own souls daily upon His Word.

When I was in eighth grade, God taught me a skill which I began to put into practice and which changed my life completely. I grew up in a Christian home where my dad read the Bible to us and prayed with us. We were committed to a church which was a Bible-teaching church and I memorized Scripture from the time I was two- or three-years old. The sermons were biblical sermons and they were sprinkled with Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible was central to my family, my life, and my thinking from a very early age.

But, I did not read it much on my own. When I tried I found myself laboring to understand it; not knowing how to read it. When I was thirteen, our church called a new pastor who began to teach the Bible paragraph by paragraph, book by book. He preached expository messages. He opened the Bible and he preached from the Books of the Bible a paragraph at a time. For the first time, as I listened to this kind of teaching, I thought to myself, “What the pastor is teaching me is awesome, powerful, and faith-building truth for my life, but he is only saying what is written on the page.”

If I slowed down in my reading and if I prayerfully thought over the words God had inspired to give to us in the Bible, if I looked at the words in the sentences and the words surrounding the sentences, I could discover this Truth for myself. That was a huge revelation to me, so I began to read the Bible carefully, slowly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully book by book and my life completely changed because of this. I discovered God willingly fed me Spiritual daily bread from His own hand. I found God speaking to me through His Word in a manner which was just as real as any conversation I would have with any other person. God was present in and through His Word teaching me, often rebuking me, exhorting me, and encouraging me and that conversation with God continues to this present day as I open up His Bible and His Word and I ask God to talk to me, teach me, and help me.

Jeremiah said, in Jeremiah 15,

<sup>16</sup> Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart...

That is what happened to me. I found them and I began to eat them and they became a joy and a delight to me!

Psalms 119 continues,

<sup>97</sup> Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

I wonder, have you discovered this essential truth in your life; the truth God delights to feed you from His own hand? He delights to offer you a spiritual feast. That is the focus of Psalm 119. It is the longest chapter in the Bible, but what a powerful one it is. God describes the vital, personal ministry He offers His people through His Word. It describes how we can grow in practical holiness of life through attending to His Word.

The author is going to use eight different terms to describe the Bible: the Law, the testimony, your precepts, your statutes, your Commandments, your judgment, your Word, and your promise. In fact, as we read all one hundred and seventy-six verses of Psalm 119, we might notice every verse contains a direct mention to God’s Word except for five of them.<sup>1</sup>

This psalm is about the Bible. It is arranged poetically as an acrostic using the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two stanzas with eight lines each and each line of the stanzas begins with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. For instance, the first eight lines of this psalm begin with the Hebrew equivalent of our English letter “A”. Every line, in the text we will study, begins with the letter “B”, and so on.

There are four parts to Verses 9-16. The first is the people to whom God is speaking. The second is the pursuit God is encouraging. The third part is the power which enables a person to complete this pursuit. Finally, we will study the plan God uses as His resource to pursue holiness.

Who is God speaking to directly? God counsels, in this text, the “young”, as we read,

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure?

This psalm applies to people of every age, but it is written with a special emphasis upon young people. The person asking the psalmist this question may be a young person asking it for himself, or it may be a person who is teaching young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Verses 3, 90, 121, 122, 132,

I am very cautious about defining the term “young”. I used to believe young referred to teenagers. Now I believe young refers to anyone under the age of thirty! It is dangerous to draw a line so I will leave that with you.

Why do you believe God addresses the longest of psalms specifically to young people? One reason is because the young have not yet experienced many of the impure sins which scar a soul forever. The genie of these sins is not yet out of the bottle, so this psalm is intended to help a person address those sins and stay free of them before they have done irreparable damage.

One advantage of youth is sin and spiritual corruption has not yet created habits and addictions to the soul. Some say every sin is the same in the eyes of God, but I do not believe that is true, not entirely anyway. True, even the smallest sin will keep us out of Heaven and will make us in need of a Savior, but some sins are more destructive to a soul than others. Some sins are more enslaving to our will and more darkening to our minds. Certain sins are like heroin in that they destroy deeply and quickly at the very first taste. It is so much more joyful never to inject that first needle than to try and kick that deadly habit.

If you are young today, I urge you to listen closely to Psalm 119. If I, as your pastor, could build a fence high enough in your life to keep you from these sins and keep you pure, I would devote every waking hour of my day to do so because I love you and I care for you. I know what joy could be yours if you are able to stay away from sin and keep your way pure. But, it is not in my power to build such a fence and it is not in your parent’s power. Only God possesses that power and Psalm 119 directs us back to Him.

Another reason God counsels the young is because youth is a season of marked impression and inquiry. Youth is more impressed by glowing promises and Satan uses that to his advantage. Furthermore, curiosity about new things still sings powerfully in the soul of a young person and that is a wonderful thing. Curiosity is a gift from God when it is used to discover more of Him and more of His glory in His creation, but the Devil also uses this inquisitiveness to his advantage. How often he whispers to a young person, “It will not hurt to try this just once. You can walk a little closer to that edge of sin. You will not get hurt. You will not fall.” Young people are directly addressed because they have opportunities to keep their way pure and there are strong temptations to overcome.

There are two principles about the young. The first is: What young people will be depends upon what they are now. As a young person, you are setting a course and direction for your life which will end in some destination for you. It is the principle of sowing and reaping. If you plant apple trees in your youth, guess what you will be harvesting in the fall of your life? You will be harvesting apples! If you plant briar weeds, guess what you will be harvesting when you are old? You will be harvesting briars!

Often a young person will reason, “I am going to sow some wild oats in my youth and then I will change when I am old. My future does not depend so much upon what I am doing right now.” The Bible says it does!

I do not deny God’s grace, many times, overcomes the sins we sow in youth, but that is not the normal course. We cannot presume upon God’s grace later in our life. That is foolish. Sin is like a boulder rolling down a mountain – it gathers speed and energy the longer it rolls. It tumbles with greater force and it is so much more difficult to stop than if we would have kept it from tipping over the edge in the first place.

The decisions of youth form habits which will either bring us immeasurable joy in the later years of our life, or unending sorrow. There is an old saying, “Sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a life. Sow a life and you reap a destiny.”<sup>2</sup> Young people, pay attention to the wisdom God gives us here.

The second principle is: Early investments multiply the good returns which await the faithful. You have great opportunity to invest now and reap abundantly in the future. The farmer does not wait until mid-summer to begin planting. The investor does not wait until their late sixties to begin a retirement account. The marathoner does not wait until the week before the marathon to begin training. Now is the time to invest! Now is the time to sow! Now is the time to prepare for an eternity!

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jesus said, in Matthew 6,

<sup>19</sup> “...lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Begin now to lay up a treasure in Heaven. Treasure in Heaven is within reach for each one of us by God’s grace and the free offer of Jesus our Savior and Lord. What is the appropriate time to begin to lay up treasure? It is now! Fools wait until later in life to begin aligning their lives with God.

God calls us to pursue a pure life, as we again consider the text,

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure?

This question has two assumptions. First, a pure life does not come to us naturally. The writer would not be asking that question if the natural course of a young person’s life was purity. No, he knows the natural course of a young person’s life is impurity. He is asking how a young person can keep his or her way pure.

The second assumption is: A pure life is valuable, something to be treasured, and something to be sought after. The reason purity is such a rich treasure is because only the pure can know God and see His glory. That is the greatest enjoyment and the greatest delight anyone could possibly experience. It is the purpose for which we are created.

In Psalm 24, the question is asked,

<sup>3</sup> Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart...

Jesus would say, in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5,

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

The writer of Hebrews says, in Chapter 12,

<sup>14</sup> ...without holiness no one will see the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Practical purity of life is the Christian’s great quest because it is through a pure life we are able to have God reveal Himself to us in such a way as to cause us to fall upon our faces and worship, and realize, “This is why I was created. This is my joy for all of eternity: to know God, to see Him, and to stand in awe of Him.”

This pursuit is the “Mount Everest” of the Christian life. From this summit we can see God. If you ever find yourself upon the top of Mount Everest, you will not ask the question: How did I get here? No one ever stumbles onto the summit of Mount Everest. The forces of life keep us away from the summit. It is an impossible climb for the average person, and this summit is impossible for even the extraordinary person. It is such a climb, no one can ascend it left in their own strength.

This climb to the summit of a pure life, so we can see God and enjoy Him, comes to us only through God’s saving and strengthening grace at work within us. How can a young man keep his way pure, the psalmist asks? We will look at that as we study the power God offers us.

The second principle under the pursuit is: God enemies actively seek to rob us of this treasure. We have adversaries who seek to push us off of that mountain and down into the valley of corruption and impurity. God’s enemies include the world around us, our own flesh and inclination to say we are tired and we do not want to climb anymore and it is more pleasant in the valley, and the Devil himself, a real person, who wages war against our soul. These enemies chase after us with cunning and perseverance. They are relentless in attacking the purity of our soul.

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<sup>3</sup> New International Version, 1984 (NIV)

Consider the Devil's pursuit. Peter warns us, in 1 Peter 5,

<sup>8</sup> Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The Devil has studied the human heart since the talk with Adam and Eve in the Garden. He knows you more than you know yourself. He knows our weaknesses, our pride, and our yearnings. He knows our flesh's folly and he uses his knowledge to bring ruin into our lives. Satan will throw dust into our eyes so we cannot see the truth about sin and the wonderful truth about God. Satan will paint temptations with gold and he will fasten diamonds on it to make it sparkle. He will reveal the "beauty" of evil, but never its ugly stain. He will distort the Christian faith so as to make it seem cheap and distasteful. He will try to convince us tasting sin is the way toward life and wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

Friend, and to young persons in particular, do you know what danger you are in and do you know you have a lion prowling to devour your soul? That is the Gospel truth. How can we overcome in the face of such powerful enemies? It is not only the Devil, but the world squeezes us to conform to its ways and values. Our own flesh pulls us down toward rebellion. How can we overcome?

This is where this psalm gives such rich encouragement: God provides a sufficient resource to live a pure life. That resource is God's Word. God gives the Scriptures to us to preserve our lives from ruin and to enable us to know Him and enjoy Him forever. Let us reread the text thoughtfully.

<sup>9</sup> How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

<sup>10</sup> With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from your commandments!

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart,

that I might not sin against you.

<sup>12</sup> Blessed are you, O LORD;

teach me your statutes!

<sup>13</sup> With my lips I declare

all the rules of your mouth.

<sup>14</sup> In the way of your testimonies I delight

as much as in all riches.

<sup>15</sup> I will meditate on your precepts

and fix my eyes on your ways.

<sup>16</sup> I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word.

How does God's Word work as a resource? Is God's Word like an instruction book which gives us step-by-step instructions and then we are responsible to follow it and do it? No, that is not the way God's Word works! God's Word does give us instructions and we are responsible to God to follow it, but if that is all the Word of God is then it would be entirely unhelpful, even frustrating. It would be like an organic chemistry lab book saying, "Just follow the instructions," and after looking at the first couple of instructions, I would say, "I have no idea what this book is telling me and how can I, with my limited understanding and knowledge, follow these directions? I cannot." I would be lost if that is all the Word of God is. We do not have strength within ourselves to obey God's instructions. Our hearts are bent toward folly.

The Bible first helps us by revealing to us our own efforts, our own exertions, our own labors, and our own commitments toward self-improvement are futile in finding the path toward purity of life. Sin is rooted too deeply within us. Our need is not for more information, but it is for inclination and it is for inspiration. Our own hearts do not want to be pure unless something happens to that heart to change it, and even if we have this desire, which we would not left to ourselves, we would not have the inclination, the inspiration, and the power in order to bring about this new life.

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:4

The Bible is not just a book of information, but it is a book of transpiration which reveals how we can be new people. How does the Bible bring purity to our lives? There are two principles. First, God's Word is God's instrument to impart His Divine life to us. That is what we need; we need new life and we need a change which begins at the very center of our being. God does not just bring to us information about Himself, but He offers us a completely new life and a transformed heart.

Jesus described God's Word as a seed which is planted in the soil and when it is planted in our own heart and of our own lives, and it is received and humbly grabbed onto, the seed provides life and something happens.<sup>5</sup> This is Peter's point, 1 Peter 1,

<sup>23</sup> ...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...

The psalmist says, later in Psalm 119,

<sup>93</sup> I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life.

God's Book is the only book which transforms a heart. God's work of providing spiritual life is the first work we need the Scripture to accomplish for us. God's Word does that for us by revealing His Son Jesus to us, a Savior who has come to forgive us of our sins, by dying upon the cross, and being buried and raised from the dead, offering His resurrected life to us if we submit to Him and call upon Him. Romans 10 says,

<sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."<sup>6</sup>

Do you have the life of God in your soul? Have you truly called upon the name of the Lord Jesus and have you said, "Jesus, you are the source of life and I need you. I need new life and I need to be transformed from the inside out." Paul would continue,

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"...<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

God's Word is God's instrument to impart life to us. If you want the life of God, begin reading the Book, saying, "God, I need to know how to obtain your life," and I believe God will show that to you.

Secondly, God's Word is an instrument to grow life within us. The more this new life we have gained through faith in Jesus, the more it rules our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions, our motivations, and our words, the purer our life will be. God intends to use His Book to strengthen us.

After a person is born again, the Word of God becomes God's instrument to grow stronger and stronger in this new life. Jesus prayed, regarding His Disciples, "sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth, Father."<sup>7</sup> He also said, in Matthew 4,

<sup>4</sup> "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The Bible is bread. We eat it and we live by it. We gain life, force, and energy from it. Peter would say, in 1 Peter 2,

<sup>2</sup> ...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in (your) salvation...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 13:3-8

<sup>6</sup> Joel 2:32

<sup>7</sup> John 17:17

<sup>8</sup> New American Standard Bible (NASB)

God generously provides us with His Word and it is His resource to us to strengthen us, so why would we neglect this resource if we know it is through this resource we can find life and strengthen this life which is our joy, which connects with our peace, and which connects with every other benefit we would receive from God?

How do we use this instrument in order to grow by it? If God has given it so we can live a pure life, how do we use it?

God directs us in making proper use of His Word. No plan can be effective apart from personal commitment and discipline. We need to commit our lives and we need to devote ourselves as the early church did to the Apostle's teaching. I urge you to create habits in your life and in your walk with God through His Word. God's Word is His very voice speaking to us.

If we want a personal relationship with God, and if we want to talk with God and hear what He is saying to us, we do not summon God through a séance or some mystical ritual. God say, "If you want to hear my living, real, and personal voice here it is. I will meet you here."

There are five practical steps we must use:

- Study it through;
- Pray it in;
- Write it down;
- Live it out; and
- Pass it on.

A pastor shared that with me when I was in college and I wrote that at the back of my Bible at that time. It has been an encouragement to me.

First, study it through. In the text we read,

- <sup>10</sup> With my whole heart I seek you;  
let me not wander from your commandments!
- <sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart,  
that I might not sin against you...
- <sup>15</sup> I will meditate on your precepts  
and fix my eyes on your ways.
- <sup>16</sup> I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word.

Look at the words used by the psalmist with regards to his study: "With my whole heart..."; "I have stored up..."; "I have hidden it..."; "I have laid up a treasure..."; "I will meditate..."; "I will fix my eyes..."; "I will delight..."; "I will not forget..." These are words of joyful devotion to studying the Scriptures and reading them over and over again, memorizing them, and continually rolling them over in our minds.

This Book is an inexhaustible treasure for us. We can never study it to such an extent we would come to the end of its riches. God captured my heart with His Word when I was about thirteen or fourteen and I began reading it. For the past thirty-three years this Book has been a source of joy, power, and God's personal relationship revealing Himself to me. I had the privilege of going to Moody Bible Institute and study God's Word; to Dallas Theology Seminary and study God's Word; and Covenant Theological Seminary and study God's Word. I can tell you, when I open this Book I get lost in its wealth. I feel as though I know about one percent of the treasure which is found here. There is so much more God offers me everyday and what a joy it is in its inexhaustible wealth.

Second, pray it in. This is God's Book and God Himself is His own interpreter. We cannot understand God's Word apart from the Holy Spirit, so I urge you, as you begin reading, pray it in. Is it not one of the great scandals of the evangelical church we boldly assert the Bible is God's Word, yet we do not read it through?

This church tries to help by establishing a reading plan, and many churches do that, but I believe it is a scandal that many Christians have been Christians for many years and if we ask, "Have you read through the entire New Testament or the entire Bible," they would respond, "No, I have not." That is a scandal. It will weaken your life and it will weaken the church.

We need God to personally meet with us to teach us, as we read in the text,

<sup>12</sup> Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes...<sup>18</sup> Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

God will do that!

Third, write it down. Write it on your heart and write it on paper. Make a commitment to memorize Scripture. Some will say, "I have tried and tried and I cannot memorize. I am not one of those people." I want you to just imagine, because I am not going to do this, I offered you \$1,000.00 for every verse you memorize by next week. How many would come here without one verse memorized? I do not believe any of us would, and yet the Word of God is such a greater treasure to our life than \$1,000.00 could every possibly be.

Set a goal, whether it is one verse a week or a paragraph a week. Then, find a friend and say, "Would you meet with me and let's recite verses we have agreed to memorize together?" You can do this! Write it down on your heart and on paper those verses you are memorizing and the incite God's gives you as you study.

I have done this throughout my life and it is fun to go through past and read passages of Scripture in which God met with me and through which He spoke to me. I will read what God revealed to me and taught me through His Word, and I will say, "Wow! That was great insight." It is as I am reading some other author because I do not remember the conversation. If I had not written it down I would have lost it altogether.

Fourth, live it out.

<sup>11</sup> I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

This is the ultimate purpose. It is not just to fill our minds, but it is to fill our lives with God, His holiness, and His worship.

Finally, pass it on.

<sup>13</sup> With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

I have the privilege each week, as your pastor, to pass on what I glean. That is a tremendous joy. Several things happen. First, the more I pass on the more I gain. It is one thing, if you pass out possessions you do not have them anymore and there is loss to that, but this is not so with God's Word. The more we pass out the more we receive, the more we remember, and the more we are able to take in because it is communicating with others we find a deeper and deeper root and joy in our lives.

Furthermore, what a strengthening way this is to lead the church of God to help young men and young women in the church to be able to maintain a pure life.

A man was walking out in the desert and a voice said to him, "Pick up some pebbles and put them in your pocket. Tomorrow you will be both happy and sad." So, he picked up some pebbles and he put them in his pocket. The next day he reached into his pocket and he felt those pebbles. As he pulled them out, the pebbles had become diamonds and rubies and emeralds. He found himself very happy of his new found treasure. But, he also found himself very, very sad, "Why did I not pick up more?"

As you dig into God's Word, grab a handful. You will find the words on the page are used by the Living God to give you treasure and you will find yourself both happy and sad.