

The Heart of Psalm 119

In every reading of Psalm 119, I am captivated by it - discovering a new theme, another revelation of God and more depth of understanding of the heart of the man who wrote it. Although the psalmist may have been David, many say the author cannot be known for certain. One thing we do know for sure. This man was led by God to write down the desire of his heart - to love God by learning, heeding and keeping His commandments.

Knowing God's way is the way of truth (Psalm 119:30), this psalmist states that God has revealed Himself through His words, statutes, commandments (law), precepts and testimonies. Determined to live according to God's plan for his life, he pays attention to what He says.

The same should be true for us today. We cannot separate the love of holy God and His commandments. As sinful men, we come short of completely obeying God's law. Jesus Christ, *The Way, the Truth and the Life*, fulfilled God's law for us, paid the price for our sin on His cross, and offered us eternal life as His love gift. What He asks from us is our heart.

Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart (Psalm 119:2). The psalmist wants the blessing of God. In the first three verses, he speaks of "those" and "they", stating a principle that those who seek God with their whole heart will walk in His ways, do no iniquity and keep His word. In verse four, he changed from speaking of God as "the Lord" and "Him" and begins his prayer with *"You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently."* From then on until the end of the psalm, his prayer is very personal using pronouns "I", "You", and "my", pledging to God the commitment of his heart.

I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn your righteous judgments (Psalm 119:7). Holy God desires our praise - for His love, for His grace expressed through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and for His righteousness.

With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments (Psalm 119:10). Even with a commitment to seek and to serve God, the psalmist knows there will always be a temptation to focus on something other than God and His will.

Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You (Psalm 119:11). Perhaps the most well known verse in this psalm, the secret to staying in God's will is to stay close to Him (or as Jesus put it "abide in Him"), to listen to Him, to know His word intimately.

I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart (Psalm 119:32). The longer a believer serves and obeys God, the larger the capacity for loving Him becomes.

Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart (Psalm 119:34). This is not a plea for understanding as the world defines it, but as God does. As Solomon put it in Proverbs 9:10: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness (Psalm 119:36). Sinful human nature can lead one to covet the things of the world. The psalmist wants to love what is lasting - the things of God.

I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word (Psalm 119:58). We do not deserve God's favor, but He promises it to those who truly love Him.

The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart (Psalm 119:69). C. H. Spurgeon said: "We must first get a thing before we can keep it. In order to keep it well we must get a firm grip of it: we cannot keep in the heart that which we have not heartily embraced by the affections." When our affections are set on God, the darts of the wicked fall short of their goal.

Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed (Psalm 119:80). Sin originates in the heart. The psalmist did not want to look back on his life and regret falling short of God's best for Him. Each of us should have the same goal. If, as a young person, we were determined to never shame the name of Christ, what a difference that would make. - *How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word* (v.9).

Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart (Psalm 119:111). God's involvement in our lives is cause for rejoicing. In his song *The Longer I Serve Him*, Bill Gaither puts it this way, "The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows."

I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end (Psalm 119:112). In verse 64 of this psalm, the author says, *Lord, the earth is filled with your faithful love; teach me Your statutes* (HCSB). God has no obligation to anyone except Himself, but even so, He shows His love to us by His faithfulness to His promises. We owe God everything and are obligated to show Him our love by trusting and obeying Him.

I cry out with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord! I will keep Your statutes (Psalm 119:145). The psalmist's decision has been made. He will remain faithful to the God who was faithful to him.

Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word. I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure (Psalm 119:161-162). The inevitable persecution that Christians encounter cannot be compared to the awesome treasure of knowing God.

To those disciples who were true believers - saved by trusting Christ alone for their salvation, Jesus said, *"Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love Him and manifest Myself to him....If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love* (John 14:19-21, 15:10).

Looking forward by faith to the Messiah's fulfillment of the law and the offer of grace through His sacrifice, the psalmist knew that his love for God would be evident as he kept His commandments.

© Stephanie B. Blake
November 2013

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references are from the New King James Version.