

TRUTH TALK

A PUBLICATION OF THE WORD FOR LIFE

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Holding Fast to the Hand that Holds Us
How God Chooses a Leader
TWFL Station Log

Truth Talk Truth Talk

Psalm 119 – The Word for Life!

Holding Fast to the Hand that Holds Us

Stanza 15 – Verses 113-120

I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law.

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.

Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!

Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

Hold me up, and I shall be safe, and I shall observe Your statutes continually.

You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood.

You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Your testimonies.

My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments.

Cover Photo: Winter in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

Richard Melzer, Photographer

TRUTH TALK

Holding Fast to the Hand that Holds Us

Without question, Psalm 119 stands in the Old Testament as a stellar example of a highly structured, intricately designed piece of Hebrew poetry. Contemporary English readers may not initially appreciate the impact of that statement, primarily because of our understanding of the nature and use of poetry in communication. Most of us think of poetry primarily as a creative way to introduce and express emotion and feeling in the communication process. Furthermore, our understanding of what constitutes poetry tends to entail either rhyme or meter (a sort of literary rhythm).

However, for the Hebrew-speaking reader, biblical poetry had a very different feel and served a very different function. For example, Hebrew poetry does not “feel” the same way as

English poetry. Rhyme or meter has almost no meaningful place in the structure of biblical poetry. Additionally, Hebrew poetry (especially when used by biblical writers) serves a different function – the expression and emphasis of ideas rather than feelings or emotions. Through the use of carefully constructed literary paragraphs, the writer expressed or emphasized important truths and made them attractive and accessible to his reader.

Psalm 119 is one of the more intricate and complex examples of both the form and function of Hebrew poetry. The twenty-two stanzas comprising the psalm are arranged in groups of eight verses, and each stanza is identified by a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This structure is a poetic device known as an acrostic. Even more amazing is that the first word of

each line in each stanza opens with a word that starts with the letter assigned to that stanza.

Clearly, someone invested a great deal of time and energy in constructing the psalm. This arrangement speaks to the intentionality of the author as well as to the importance of his message. Additionally, the psalm may have been structured in this way in order to aid the reader in retaining and recalling its message.

The big message being communicated by the psalmist has to do with walking the way of God's Word. More specifically, the advantage of such a walk, requirements for success, and what the pilgrim will experience during the journey. Each stanza contributes some important truth related to this theme in order to better prepare readers who desire to follow the same path trod by this pilgrim.

By the time we get to this stanza, our pilgrim is well past the half-way point in the journey. We have noted that the psalm traces his journey progressively. However, we have also noted that from

time to time, the experiences of an earlier stanza are repeated in a later stanza with greater intensity. Decisions made early on in the journey are tested again and again under new or more intense circumstances. Earlier observations are confirmed in later stanzas. Former commitments are reaffirmed, and new appeals are made as the journey gets progressively more difficult.

In all of this, our psalmist's passion for walking the way of the Word has not diminished, nor has his commitment decreased. If anything, it has intensified, along with the intensification of the difficulty of the path. No longer is it the starry-eyed aspiration of an untried youth or untested novice. Rather, it is the deep-seated affirmation of a man who has been tested by life's storms and, though bruised and battered, he remains even more firmly resolved to remain on the path!

Early on in the journey, his conversation was filled with either wonderful resolutions of all that he aspired to do for God or desperate pleas for help, as the diffi-

culty of the journey began to take its toll. However, though our pilgrim is the same individual speaking to us now, he is not the same person. He has grown in the journey, and the journey has strengthened him and made him wiser, stronger, and more resilient. Consequently, even though the path is much more difficult at this stage in the journey, our pilgrim walks with a strength and confidence born out of the journey that was not present when he started out on the pathway.

I. His Settled Commitment (vv. 113-114):

I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law. You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.

By now our pilgrim has formed a fixed and unflinching response to those who oppose him on the path. He has clearly defined feelings about what he rejects and what he embraces and is not

afraid to state them boldly. He has not time or room for those who vacillate on the path. The idea of being “double-minded” is not primarily that a person is indecisive or unable to make firm decisions. Very often a “double-minded” man has reached very firm and settled decisions that result in his “double-mindedness.”

Being double-minded in the Scripture has to do primarily with the loyalty of one’s heart or mind. A double-minded heart is a divided heart that is giving loyalty or allegiance that exclusively belongs to someone to another. A double-minded person is one who walks on the path but gives loyalty and allegiance to those who are walking in the other direction. Our pilgrim has no truck with such a traveler. Instead, his loyalty is devoted exclusively to God and to His Law!

Hating in this context is not primarily expressing an emotion of the heart as much as the decisive orientation and direction of one’s heart and life. Many travelers on the path have not oriented themselves exclusively toward God

and are not fully and wholeheartedly committed to shaping and conforming their lives to God's Torah.

Often such individuals divide their loyalty in order to obtain a perceived benefit. One important benefit a traveler might need on the path is that of provision or protection. While others might walk the way of the Word and look to other things for provision or protection, our pilgrim refuses to divide his heart. Instead, he boldly casts his lot with God. God alone is his "hiding place" or his shelter or refuge. God alone is his "shield" or protection. If God fails in either case, all is lost!

What was the difference between our pilgrim and his double-minded fellow travelers? Simply put, he confidently trusted in what God said, whereas they did not. He walked by faith in God's Word; they walked by sight.

Each of us must make the same choice. Will we orient our feet by faith or by sight? Will we divide our heart and turn away from God's Law when He seems

to have forgotten us? Who or what will then be our trust? God can and will be our provision and protection – but only when we commit exclusively to His Word!

II. His Bold Declaration (v. 115):

Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God!

It is one thing to make internal, private commitments to remain loyal to God. It is quite another to declare those decisions boldly in the midst of disloyal men. This is not the first time the psalmist has interacted with us or with God about wicked people he has encountered on the path. Throughout the psalm, he has shared his feelings toward these men with us, the readers. Frequently he has spoken to God about them, as well. However, this is the first time in the psalm that our pilgrim addresses the evildoers directly. And there is no question or hesita-

tion when he speaks – he does not stutter when he rebukes them boldly and openly. “Depart from me – you doers of evil!”

At some point in our journey, each of us must come to the place where we personally, decisively, openly, and permanently cast our lot with God and against those who work evil in His sight.

Not only is the psalmist clear in his separation from those who are committed evil-doers, he is clear in his commitment to keeping and obeying God’s commandments. For the psalmist, separation is both from something and to something. He is separated from those who reject God, and to that which God has commanded! And what has been internalized and expressed to God and to us up to this point in the psalm is now openly professed and boldly proclaimed to those evildoers themselves.

III. His Continual Dependence (vv. 116-117)

*Uphold me according to
Your word, that I may live;*

*and do not let me be
ashamed of my hope. Hold
me up, and I shall be safe,
and I shall observe Your sta-
tutes continually.*

Such bold proclamations have real life consequences. This the psalmist knows only too well. And so he appeals to God for sustenance and security in light of his bold declaration. This is really the heart of the stanza – an appeal for God to hold up the pilgrim who has held on to God!

In verse 116 he cries out for Divine sustainment on the basis that God has promised such in His Word to those who hold on to Him! The psalmist has put all his eggs in this one basket – what God’s Word has said, God would do for those who trust in Him. He beseeches God that his confidence would not let him down.

But what will prop up our traveler’s heart as he waits for God’s reply? None other than God Himself. Just as boldly and confidently as he addressed his enemies, the psalmist now addresses

God. When speaking to his enemies, the psalmist boldly and unashamedly made statements that put him past the point of no return. Once his bold statement was made, there was no longer any possibility of fellowship or security among the double-minded. In the same way, our psalmist makes a bold declaration to God from which there is no turning back. If God, to whom our psalmist is holding so firmly, does not hold him up, there will be no hope for our pilgrim.

His confidence is expressed in the form of a further commitment to observe God's statutes continually. This is both a confident expectation that God will indeed hold him up, and he will be around to continue rendering obedience to God, as well as the articulation of his desire for God's protection – so that he might continue to give obedience to God's statutes.

What ought to strike each of us is that the psalmist is not making a "deal" with God, in which he promises obedience for protection or provision. He is not dickering

with Deity, as we are so prone to do when facing difficulty or trial. His heart is oriented to obey, and his desire is to have opportunity to continue rendering such obedience to God. He has cast his entire lot on the Word he has come to love to obey. His appeal to God is based squarely on God's statements contained in that Word. His confidence is in the Word and what it reveals about God, rather than in some obedience promised to God, but only if He delivers.

IV. His Consistent Observation / Conviction (vv. 118-119)

You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love Your testimonies.

Now our pilgrim reveals the basis for his bold declaration in verse 115 – God's settled response

toward those very men described earlier as evildoers and here as those who “stray from His statutes.” His decision to separate from certain people was based on what he knew about God’s response to those who set their heart to intentionally stray from His stated will. Straying in verse 118 is intentional and willful, as opposed to accidental or unintentional. Those being described are men who have intentionally rejected God’s stated directives and have willfully and repeatedly refused to obey what God has clearly mandated.

God’s settled response to such men is to reject them! As they have turned and spurned His Word, so now He spurns and rejects them. Deceit in this context is not merely spoken lies, but rather a disloyal life that is fundamentally false. This is particularly the case when the person in question claims to be a follower of God!

The psalmist further observes that not only does God reject such people; He removes them from His presence like a smelter would

remove dross from the precious metal being smelted.

In light of the awesome and awful reality awaiting those who are double-minded, the psalmist determines not to be numbered among them. Such individuals are marked by an intentional wandering from God’s statutes. Therefore, the psalmist declares his determination that his life be marked by the opposite trait – a deep and abiding love for God’s testimonies!

V. His Personal Response (v. 120)

My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments.

As the stanza draws to a close, the psalmist ends with a surprising statement – one in which he confesses a deep fear of God and for His judgments. This statement is surprising, because the stanza opened with the psalmist professing his deep love and affection for

God and for His Word. How can these two strong emotions dwell compatibly in the same heart at the same time?

Interestingly, the Bible makes a strong correlation between love and fear, especially when God and His Word are the objects of these emotions. In other words, not only are these emotions compatible with each other, they are indispensable components to loving God properly and living for Him acceptably.

A healthy balance of love and fear are necessary for a proper life orientation toward God that

results in healthy, biblical obedience rendered in the right way and for the right reason.

Conclusion

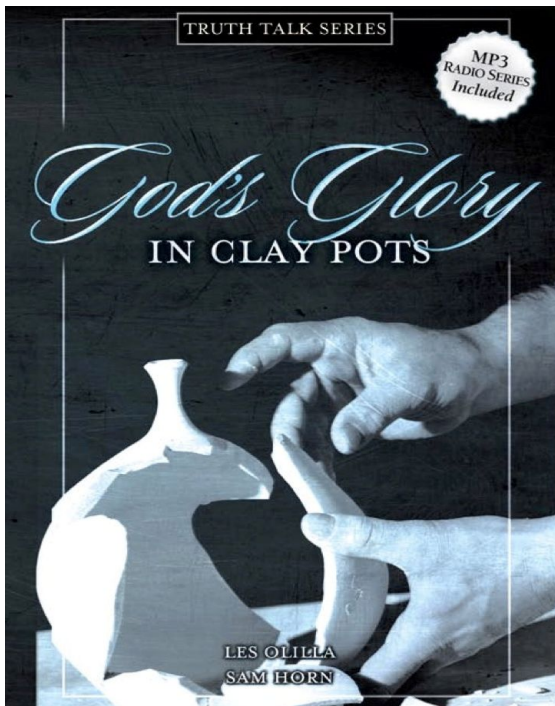
What does love for God look like when properly balanced by fear of God? How would you spot it in your own life? It looks like a life of balanced obedience that sides with God in all matters. It looks like a life that holds fast to God and to Him alone. It is displayed in exclusive loyalty to God and to His Word. God holds us up when we hold on to Him in this way!



Dr. Sam Horn is the featured teacher and Host of The Word For Life, Senior Pastor of Brookside Baptist Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin, and Vice President of Ministerial Training at Northland International University in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

NEW BOOK RELEASE!

GOD'S GLORY IN CLAY POTS



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HOW GOD CHOOSES A LEADER

Life is a Vapor – Part 8

Join Pastor Sam Horn (SH) and Dr. Les Ollila (LO) for a discussion that originally aired on THE WORD FOR LIFE.

SH: We are continuing our discussion, attempting to answer the question that James set forth for us in the fourth chapter of his letter when he asked the question, “What is life?” He summed it up as a vapor that appears for a little while and vanishes away. We talked a little about how we make that vapor count by being the kind of person that can live the dream that God has set forth for us. We studied the life of Joseph and saw an Old Testament character who was able to live out his dream. We also talked about Lot, a man who didn't live out his dream, who had every advantage and yet blew it. As we studied the life of Lot, we noted that he made some tragic mistakes – the same mistakes that often plague us. I have a question for you this morning. We talked about Lot and we

talked about Joseph, but as we study the Scriptures, there does seem to be an interesting thing about the way God chooses His leaders. I'm curious – what do you think was the secret to David's being chosen? Why did God choose him?

LO: Well, it's interesting, Dr. Horn, to see that he wasn't chosen from human capability. His own father overlooked him when Samuel came to anoint the next king. And so, we see in I Samuel, chapter 16, that his choosing was contrary to human reason. It was not the reasonable choice. In fact, Eliab seemed to have all of the physical attributes of leadership. He was the oldest, yet we find out later that he was the one who was fighting God's plan and fighting God's man. If you look in I Sam-

uel 16, you see how David was overlooked. It says in verse 6, "And it came to pass when they were come that he looked on Eliab and said surely this is God's anointed before him. But the Lord said to Samuel, look not on his countenance or the height of his stature, for I have refused him, for the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Jesse had seven sons, and in verse 11 it says, "Samuel said unto Jesse, are these all thy children? And he said there yet remains the youngest. Behold he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, send and fetch him, for we will not sit down until he come hither."

SH: It's interesting that even his father didn't think he was worthy to come to the feast.

LO: No. But we also see the greatest quality of leadership is being a servant. What was he do-

ing? He was out serving with the sheep.

SH: While the rest of his brothers were at the sacrifice.

LO: And there he was as a young lad, learning the greatest quality of leadership. But he was overlooked because he was not the one who would be obviously the chosen one for the kingship.

SH: We're trying to answer the question, what is our life and how do we make it count? I'm sure many of our listeners have felt the way you and I have felt from time

to time...that those who we see as spiritual leaders often overlook what we sense the Lord may be doing in us. Samuel here, in the very beginning of the chapter, overlooks David. He is stuck on Saul. He is mourning, and God has to move him past that. I think sometimes we get discouraged when we think that we're not measuring up to someone else's standard.

"...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

LO: Saul had a very difficult time when he was king. He started out humble and then got arrogant, and when it came time for his removal, Samuel had a hard time with that. And then, David was not the most likely one, but we see that it was contrary to human reason. The second thing we see is it was conditioned by heart response. You see, God knew the heart of Saul. He knew that he would never honor Him, so He removed him. The kingship was given in the first place because of the rebellion of the people – they were not willing to depend on God. So God was looking for someone whose heart was right with Him. That's why it was said, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. In other words, God doesn't see the way that man sees. That's why in working with young people, those of you working in local churches, do not overlook that little snaggle-toothed boy with messed hair, because that may be the one who God sees has a heart for Him. He can use him, contrary to human reason. He can use him because of his heart response, not because of all of the

seeming external qualities that he has.

SH: That's so true. There are a lot of potential Davids running around in our churches. In fact, many of the men listening to us may be fathers of potential Davids in their own homes.

LO: What a needful ministry for men in the church to look for kids in our society who are from single parent homes. No dad. What a terrible mark on society when children are raised without a father influence, because it affects their image about who God is.

SH: You know, this may be a little off the topic here, and if it is, Doc, feel free to just come back to the text you're looking at, but I know you've done some reading in a book called "Faith of the Fatherless." Can you share with our listeners just a brief snippet from that about what you discovered in your reading, because I think this ties in with what we're just talking about here.

LO: Yes, it does. This author pointed out that he studied the

lives and backgrounds and biographies of all the famous agnostics and atheists. They all had one common denominator...a bad father relationship. They had either an absent father, an abusive father, an angry father or, for whatever reason, a father that was not in their lives. And some were so bitter at the father that they even had their names legally changed so they were not carrying the name of their father. This is a great challenge to the men. Don't overlook those who seemingly are nobodies, because God looks at the heart response, and what if God gets a hold of that heart?

Another thing that is characterized by heavenly recognition is that God had His approval on David, and man did not. David's father did not, and Samuel first of all did not because he saw Eliab, and he assumed Eliab was the one. It really was a heavenly recognition, and that's what counts. When we see the anointing that takes place, that was God's approval for His choice to be king.

SH: God's signature on David's life.

LO: Yes, it was. And it was evident about that choosing. Samuel took the horn of oil, anointed him in the midst of the brethren, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up and went to Ramah, as we see in verse 13. David had good character. You see a lot of character. He was disciplined, he was very obedient. To become the musician that he was, he had to be an extremely disciplined young man. He was a wallflower, obviously, but extremely ruddy, talented, and he must have been very strong.

SH: When you were talking about conditioned heart response, you made an interesting contrast between David and Saul. I'm thinking ahead now to some other things that we might get to, either in this broadcast or in a later broadcast. What was the difference between David's heart response and Saul's? And what accounted for that difference?

LO: I think it was their view of God. Saul was self-centered and David was God-centered. Every decision Saul made was based on

how it would affect him. David's decisions were made by how they affected God's reputation. This is a really good sign of repentance, too. Saul's repentance focused on how it was going to affect him. David's repentance focused on how God was affected by the situation. That's the difference in whether or not there is a permanency and change, versus a temporary looking for relief.

SH: I believe you mentioned in one of our prior broadcasts that if you were to list out David's sins and compare them to Saul's sins, David would come out on the negative side of that list. He is the one that has broken every one of the Ten Commandments, and some of those Ten Commandments more than once. And yet, God accepted David's repentance, but God didn't accept Saul's. You're saying it's because of the inner heart that God was able to see.

LO: Yes. Saul was worried about his own reputation. David was worried about God's reputation. To me, that's the difference that

God could see. You see, everything Saul was doing was to protect himself and his own reputation. David's whole life was considering God's reputation.

SH: That leads into the whole concept of brokenness, doesn't it? As we think about our own lives, so often when we sin we want to be respectable, and we don't want to get authentic with God about who we really are and what we've really done.

LO: That's right. We draw a line, and we deal with respectability when God's really dealing with us. Someone tries to help us and we say, "Well, I don't read the Bible enough." I've never met anyone in my life who read the Bible too much. "Well, I'm not praying as I should." I've never met anyone who prays too much. Those are all respectable things. When the heart is able to trust another person, there will be not just the desire to be respectable, but the desire to get to the real need in the situation. What is really happening in the heart. And you'll find in counseling that when someone begins to trust

you, they'll go beyond respectability to real.

SH: The key to God's choosing David is that there was an authentic reality about his life. There was a realness there.

LO: A transparency that many times is lacking in people's lives.

SH: So how do the people who are listening to us get that? How do we get from where we are to there?

LO: It's all based on our view of God. How we see God. Isaiah saw himself, his condition, when he saw God for who God was. It's all centered in our view of God. That's why knowing God is so crucial. Knowing God affects everything else we do in life. They who know their God shall be strong and do exploits, it says in Daniel.

SH: And David certainly did that as a young boy, didn't he?

LO: He did. Even after his sin, there was repentance, and he's on record as a man after God's own heart. To review, choosing David was contrary to human reason. It was conditioned by a heart response, and it was characterized by heavenly recognition. That's what we have to look for in our own lives when we choose to be leaders.

SH: You know, if we're going to make our life count as James is talking about, those are the things that ultimately matter. We tend to live for the things that don't matter, and yet the things that are important to God are so often times the things we overlook. Those three things that are so crucial in God's sight...I wonder if you could just go over those one more time for us.

The key to God's choosing David is that there was an authentic reality about his life. There was a realness there.

LO: David was not the one who was evident as the leader, but God saw the inner man. David had that by his language...as a teenager he lay on his bedroll at night and worshiped the awesome God. The heavenly recognition was the

fact that God says, “You look on the outward, but I look on the inward. I know this man, and I know he will love Me and obey Me.” And then we see that heart response where David responded very clearly in his heart because he had that heart for God.

SH: A powerful story of the early choice of David by God. And, Doc, in our next broadcast I'm excited to look ahead, as we study the conflict that David had with the giant that we're all so familiar with, and to see how God used all of this.



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THE Word FOR Life


Helping You Live a God-Centered, Truth-Driven Life

We are so thankful for those of you who have made it part of your lives to join us for The Word For Life radio broadcasts. We invite you to go to our website, www.thewordforlife.org, where you can download past daily and weekend broadcasts, as well as previous editions of *Truth Talk*. Our desire is to continue to spread the Word of God to a needy world, helping folks live a God-centered, truth-driven life.

Following is a testimony from one of our listeners:

... because you consistently speak the truth in love - just about the time I feel like I will never be a faithful servant, I feel a renewed hope that I am a work in progress and there is room for error and repentance. I think it is because you are honest about your own struggles.

God is clearly using your ministry to educate and enrich people and encouraging them to remain faithful and to keep running the race to win the prize! Thank you for all that you do. -- Sue



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