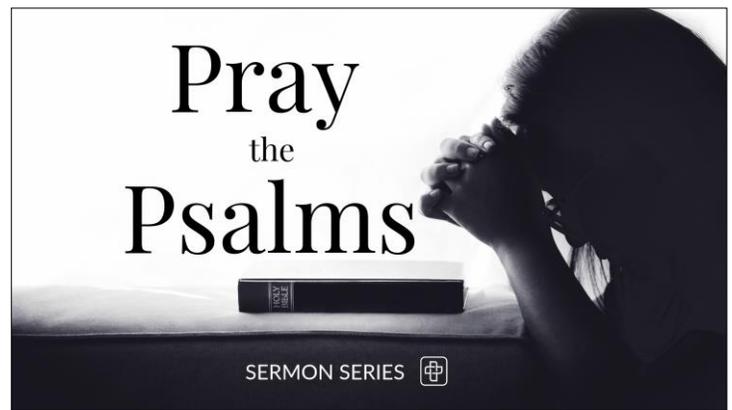




Severing Sin With God's Word

Psalm 119:9-16

Brandon Stern August 11, 2019



Please open your Bibles to Psalm 119. We'll be looking at verses 9-16 this morning. This week we're continuing our study in this amazing chapter of the Bible. What makes this chapter so special is that for 176 verses, the psalm writer gives us a front row seat into his relationship with God. In verse after verse after verse, he pours out his heart to God.

This man's faith is alive and active. He's engaged with the world, especially with his God. He doesn't shy away from talking about the primary struggles of life which is our suffering and sin. Instead, he writes line after line, modeling for us how we are to think about these struggles. Today we have the opportunity to listen in as he talks about his struggle with sin, then next week we'll learn from him how to process our suffering.

Think with me about your relationship with sin this morning. Have you ever lost hope in your battle against sin? Have you ever felt so defeated, so beaten down, that you just didn't know what to do? Sin can have this effect on us, can't it? Of course, this isn't how sin makes us feel when it's trying to tempt us. When sin is tempting us, it makes itself look so appealing to us, so good for us, so what we need to make us happy. But then sooner or later we feel the sting of sin's betrayal. What we looked to for satisfaction is now pointing its finger at us and laughing. We get frustrated with ourselves, but this only leads to more feelings of discouragement and hopelessness. It seems like no matter how hard we try or what we do, we just can't seem to make any progress.

This struggle with sin is what Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane call "the problem of the gospel gap." The gospel gap problem comes from our struggle to understand how the good news of Jesus Christ meets us in the particulars of our daily lives. You see, as Christians we're pretty good at understanding that when we trust in Jesus Christ, we are saved and brought into relationship with God. That's the past of the gospel. We're also pretty good at understanding the future of the gospel. We know that one day Christ will come back to this earth and we'll live with Him forever, free from sin and free from struggle.

So the past and the future of the gospel are gloriously and wondrously true. But far too often we fall prey to the problem of the gospel gap. We overlook the present benefits of the gospel for us today. We fail to see the ways God has provided for us today—August 11, 2019—to live a life that is pleasing to Him. This is precisely what our sin wants. It wants us to keep thinking it has power over us, but there is an empty tomb outside Jerusalem that says otherwise. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been set free from the power of sin.

I want to get really specific here, because the gospel doesn't just deal with broad generalities; it enters into the specifics of our lives. This means that in your struggle with porn, a struggle you may feel so helpless with right now, you can be set free. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine a day when you can put the phone down and walk away? I'm not saying this is going to happen tomorrow and I'm definitely not saying this will be easy. By the authority of God's Word, what I am saying is this is possible. Being set free is possible. Christian, do you believe that this morning? In our passage this morning the psalm writer believes that with all his heart and wants each one of us to believe that as well.

I want to read this passage, then we're going to pray and ask God to give each of us faith in His Word. As I'm praying, I would encourage each of you to pray silently in your hearts to God, asking His Spirit to work in your heart in a powerful way this morning through His Word. Let's go to God's Word. Hear God's Word to you this morning from Psalm 119:9-16:

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

Let's pray and ask for God's help.

Father, Son, Spirit, we praise You for Your Word which is powerful. When You spoke, the universe came into existence. Thank You that through Your Word and by Your Spirit, You still speak into our lives today with that same power. So we ask now that You would give each of us faith to believe and obey Your Word to us. We ask these things in the strong and powerful name of our risen and victorious Savior. Amen.

Purity & God's Word

Let's look at God's Word to us, beginning in verse nine. The psalm writer begins with this thought-provoking question: *"How can a young man keep his way pure?"* I want you to think about that question. If someone were to ask you that question, what would you say? How would you answer? I'm not talking about what you think you should say—kind of the good Christian answer. What do you actually believe about that? Do you think it's possible for a young man to keep his way pure?

You see, the way you answer that question will reveal a lot to you about how big your gospel gap may be. Unfortunately, I think for too many of us—myself included—we don't really believe what God's Word teaches about our relationship with sin. However, the psalm writer does and he answers his own question with a strong "Yes." He says, "Yes, it is possible—but only by guarding your life according to the Word of God." So this is what he commits himself to do.

Look at verse ten: *"With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commands."* The psalm writer realizes his only hope for living a life of obedience and faithfulness to God comes from seeking God with all that he is. He's not looking to his own strength to pull this off. He knows he needs God's help to do this.

I love how honest he is. Look at the text. He's not overconfident in his ability to pursue purity. He knows all too well how alluring, how tempting sin can be to him, how quickly his heart is "prone to wander, prone to leave the God he loves." What does he do? He throws himself on God's grace and cries, "O God, don't let me wander from Your commandments."

What we're seeing here is the humble cry of someone who recognizes he is completely dependent on God's grace. Left to himself, he knows he would wander far from his God. But he doesn't want to do that, so he prays for God to keep him. And hear me on this—this is so very important. Notice that his prayer doesn't lead to passivity on his part, but faith-fueled action. His dependence on God, does not lead to passivity on his part, but to faith-fueled action. Look at verse 11: *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."*

You see, this is what a living faith looks like. He prays, "God, don't let me wander from Your commandments." Then believing God will do just that, he works hard at storing God's Word in his heart. I think it's the second part where many of us struggle and it's the reason why so many of us feel defeated in our struggles against sin. We expect God to do for us what He has called and equipped us to do for ourselves. Far too often we're like the squirrel that prays for God to provide food for winter, but then refuses to put in the work of gathering nuts in autumn so finds himself hungry when the cold winds come.

Our psalm writer knows better than that. He knows that nuts left out in the forest will not feed him for the winter, so he busies himself storing away God's truth in his heart. He carves out time in his busy life to read and listen to God's Word, because he wants God's Word to come into him, shape him and control how he thinks, how he desires and how he chooses. He knows that only then will he be able to not sin against his God.

So he cries out in verse 12, "*Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!*" Can you sense his passion, his urgency, his utter dependence on God? What he's praying for is not simply knowledge of God's teaching, but the grace to do what God demands of him. The idea here is, "Teach me to do what You have commanded." He works hard at storing God's Word in his heart, but he's ever mindful of his need for God's grace. God must teach him to do what He has commanded. He prays to his beloved God, "O God, teach me to walk in Your ways. I don't want to wander from Your commands."

He knows deep down in his heart that the only way he's able to stay pure is if he keeps himself according to God's Word. So he asks God, "*Teach me your statutes!*" This is a wonderful prayer for us to pray as well. As you spend time in God's Word, always be asking God to make you not only a hearer of His Word, but a doer as well (James 1:22-25). "Teach me to do Your commands."

Fruit & God's Word

The last four verses describe the joyful fruit God's Spirit is producing in him through His Word. These can be true of you today as well. Look at verse 13: "*With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.*" I love what one commentator, Christopher Ash, has to say about this verse:

There is a delightful movement here from the mouth of God to the heart of the believer, then on to the lips. The covenant God speaks the word, that word is stored away in the heart, that heart overflows and the lips declare with joy that covenant word.

What a beautiful picture! As the Word of God gets stored up in his heart, it can't help but overflow from his lips. You see, like anything we really love, it has to be shared with others for our joy to be complete. So he opens his mouth to proclaim the rules of his God. What exactly are the rules he proclaims? Is he just going around saying, "Honor your father and mother. Don't murder. Don't steal"? I don't think so. I think there's something much richer going on here in what he's saying.

You see, the word translated "rules" in the ESV is really a hard word to translate, so it gets translated different ways even throughout this Psalm. For example, he writes in verse 132, "*Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name.*" This verse is getting at the way God interacts with those He loves. His way toward His people is gracious. That's His posture toward His people.

Then in verse 149 we read, "*O Lord, according to your justice give me life.*" Here again the word is getting at the idea of God's judicial decision in favor of His people. It's His posture toward His people that's one of grace, where His judgments—His justice toward them—is favorable.

So when we come back to verse 13, we can better understand what he's saying. When he says, "*With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth,*" he's not talking about repeating a list of God's rules. He's delighting in the gracious way God rules the world on behalf of His people. He's celebrating the fact that God makes judgments in favor of His people, that His way toward His people is gracious. It's this truth about God that makes his heart sing.

In verse 14, his awe and wonder at his God continues to overflow: "*In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.*" Do you hear how he's talking? God's Word is so much more to him than a textbook of interesting facts. You see, no one talks about a textbook like this, right? Can you imagine a math student saying, "Oh, with my lips I declare all the equations of my math book; I delight in all the formulas"? No! That's crazy. That's not how we talk about textbooks.

This is the language of love. This is how lovers speak to one another. You see, the psalm writer isn't interested in storing God's Word in his heart to simply master the material, to know the facts, to pass a test on the Bible. No, he's storing God's Word in his heart because he wants to know the God he loves and the God Who loves him. That's what's driving him.

Just skim your eyes over this passage. Notice all the second-person singulars—every you and your. This is a deeply personal psalm. He's pouring out his heart to God. He's delighting in the faithfulness of his God above all riches, above anything else this world has to offer. He has his God Who is faithful to him.

This joy, this delight in God, causes the psalm writer to make some concrete commitments to God. In these last couple of verses, the psalm writer shares his plan with us for how he is going to work hard at storing God's Word in his heart. Look with me at verse 15. *"I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways."* In committing to meditating on God's Word, he's committing to slow down and really mull over it; to ponder and think deeply about what God is revealing about Himself in His Word.

This is how the Word of God really gets buried down deep into our hearts. You see, meditation is the process of taking a piece of information from the mind—like "God is loving"—and moving it down into the heart where it is felt and believed. "God loves me." There's a big difference from the information that God is loving, to feeling and believing that God loves us.

Notice that Christian meditation is not an emptying of the mind, but rather a filling of the mind with the truths of God until they begin to get buried deep into our hearts. As the Word of God works its way into our hearts, it does some amazing things. It begins to rearrange our priorities. It starts reshaping our desires and changing our commitments. This is the powerful, life-changing effect the Word of God can have on your life.

This is so convicting for me. My Bible reading and meditation are just not where I want them to be. I struggle making time to really slow down and thoughtfully meditate, think on and ponder my way through a passage. In a room this size, I'm sure there are many of you who do this far better than I do. I would really love to learn from you on what you do and how the Lord has been ministering to you through it.

But for those of you who, like me, want to improve on this, maybe we can take just one step closer to doing this better. I want to share with you a couple ways I've been trying to grow in this. Now, what I'm about to share with you is certainly not the only ways to do this, so I would encourage you to talk to other godly Christians for suggestions on different ways to grow in this. But here at least are a few things I've been trying to do this past year to help me grow in this area.

Each morning when I wake up, I start with a simple prayer. I just ask God, "Teach me something from Your Word. I'm about to read Your Word—minister its truth to me. Show me something from Your Word that I need." I then read a portion of Scripture.

This year I've been trying to read a chapter of Proverbs each day. I read the chapter that corresponds with the date. Today is the 11th, so I read Proverbs 11. However, instead of just reading through it once—and this is one of the changes I've made recently—I go back and read it a second time. This slows me down and gives me a second opportunity to think through God's Word to me.

I then make myself find one bit of truth that I want to focus on. This can be a theme of the passage or even just a verse or two that really stand out to me. Sometimes this happens quickly. Are there times when you're reading your Bible and something jumps off the page.? You think, "Wow, that's amazing. I really want to think about that." But there are other mornings when it takes a little more effort. Maybe you have to read through it three or four times, praying, "God, show me something. I need Your Word today. Teach me something from Your Word."

I work at this until I find something I can focus on, then I write a little note about it. It doesn't have to be long—just a couple sentences or so. Here's an example of what I wrote a few days ago from Proverbs 8:

A few lines from verses 32 and 34 really stood out to me: "Those who keep my ways are happy. Anyone who listens to me is happy." I was taken by the truthfulness of this. God's ways really are what is best. His desire for me is my good. What sin-destroying power this truth has. May God help me believe it more and more each day.

There's nothing fancy there, but in doing this, I'm forcing myself to spend some time thinking about the truth and how it applies to my life. Once I've written my little note, then I pray for God to work this truth into my heart. "O God, help me believe that Your ways lead to happiness. Sin makes all kinds of promises to me that it will satisfy and make me happy. Help me believe that You know what's best for me. Give me this grace today. Amen." Then once I've written about this and prayed about it, in order to keep me accountable to doing this each day, I text that note to a few of my friends.

I'm certainly not saying this is the only way or even the best way to do this. But it is a way I've been trying to grow in this over the past year. Reading through the passage twice and making myself write a note about it has at least helped me slow down and think more deeply about what I'm reading.

Another way I've tried doing this is by listening to God's Word on a Bible app. This has been a game changer for me. I've never really done that much before, but a couple months ago we had the opportunity to go on a road trip to New York to visit my grandparents and I decided to listen to the Bible while I drove. I thought, "Why not?" I've been reading my way through the Old Testament and I had gone through Numbers by the time we left on our trip.

So when we were pulling out of St. Charles, I started listening in Deuteronomy 1. Then by the time we made it to New York, I had listened to Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and half of 2 Kings. It was amazing! I'll be honest. I wasn't thinking it would be this awesome. But when I finished it, I thought, "Whoa, this is so cool!" What I started to see was

more of the Bible's big storyline, some of the big themes of how great God is and what a gracious Redeemer He is to His people.

You see, in going from Deuteronomy all the way through 2 Kings, basically I was getting the whole history of Israel—and it's not pretty. Over and over again, they're sinning. They're forsaking their God. They're disobeying their God. Yet over and over again, what are we seeing? A God of remarkable, staggering grace, mercy and compassion. Over and over again, this theme was emerging for me. I thought, "Oh, my goodness. What an amazing God we serve." It was an incredible day.

You see, what's so valuable about listening or reading through large chunks of Scripture is that it really allows the Word of God to get into your heart. You start to catch the rhythm of the Bible. You start to see the storyline of Scripture more clearly and see God's sovereign and gracious work of salvation shine brighter and brighter from the pages of Scripture.

Now, I know this was a unique opportunity. I don't drive to New York every week, thank goodness. But what about our daily commutes to work or running errands? You know, I'm from Texas. There's a lot of traffic here so it takes a long time to get anywhere. What are we doing with that 20, 30, 60 minutes or more on our commutes? Let's allow the Word of God to pour into our lives during that time.

You see, the goal of all this is for us to think Bible. We want the Word of God to become such a part of our lives that it's changing the way we live. So spend time pondering, meditating on, thinking deeply about a specific truth of God's Word. But also spend some time listening to lots of God's Word at a time. Give yourself regular exposure to God's Word and, like the psalm writer, commit to doing this. Say, "I need God's Word to live inside me. I need it to shape the way I think, desire and choose, so I'm going to expose myself to it." *

Delight & God's Word

Let's look at the final verse in this section, verse 16: "*I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.*" Here the psalm writer is committing himself to delighting in God's statutes. Why wouldn't he? He knows the loving and good heart of his God. He knows the laws of God are given to him for his good. So whereas others may view God's law with suspicion, as being limiting or suppressive or cramping their style, he commits to delighting in what God's Word says. He commits to viewing God's Word, not as a barricade between him and the good life, but as a pathway into lasting joy and satisfaction: "*I will delight in your statutes...*"

Paul Tripp provides this helpful illustration that I want to share with you:

Think of the word picture of boundaries. Pretend there is a yard you are living in that contains every good, true and beautiful thing a human being could ever want. Around this yard is a 20-foot-high chain link fence. Consider further that outside, on the other side of the fence, is a world of real danger and things that will cause your death. If you accept that what is inside the yard is really very good—things that give you life—and if you accept that what is outside the fence is really very bad—things that lead to death—wouldn't you be thankful for the fence and wouldn't you be willing to live inside the fence with contentment and joy?

But think with me. If you looked at that fence every day, thinking about how you could get through it or over it, or if you touched it and shook it to test its strength, if you tried your best to look through it until you had fence marks on your face, wouldn't you be doing all of that because you believe that the good stuff may be on the other side of the fence?

You see, you have much more than a behavior problem; you have a boundary problem. You don't believe the fence is there to ensure that you have what is good. No, you have come to believe that the fence is in the way of good, so the minute you allow yourself to believe that you are on your way to finding a means of getting to the other side of the fence.

What about you this morning? What is your posture toward God and His law? Do you have fence marks on your face because you're so convinced that the good life is outside of God's law? Have you come to believe that you know what's best for you, better than your gracious God? Or, like the psalm writer, are you learning by God's grace to delight in the fence? Do you see in God's rules the heart of your loving and good, good Father Who knows what is best for you?

This is why spending time in God's Word is so very important in our battle against sin. The more we get to know God, the more our hearts will grow to love Him and trust Him. The sad reality is that every time we sin, we do so because we love our sin. We sin because we love our sin. So how can we overcome our love for sin? By a surpassing love for God. What motivates this love for God? Seeing His grace to us throughout the pages of Scripture, climaxing in the giving of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So read your Bibles. Read your Bibles, not just to learn some interesting facts, but to get to know and love your gracious Redeemer.

This is why, at the end of verse 16, the psalm writer says, "*I will not forget your word.*" He knows deep down that if he forgets God's Word, he will not be able to keep his way pure. He knows that if he doesn't busily work to store God's Word in his heart, he will sin against his God. So in

faith that God will teach him His Word and not let him wander from His commandments, he commits himself to the hard work of meditating on God's Word and delighting in His statutes.

I want to conclude by offering a warning and an encouragement to us as we process all we've been hearing from God's Word.

A Warning from God's Word

First, the warning. In Mark 4:1-9, Jesus tells the story of a man who went out to scatter seed. As he was scattering the seed, some of the seed fell along the path and the birds came and ate it, so it was gone. Some seed fell among the rocks and it shot up quickly, but then it withered because of the sun's heat. Other seed fell among the thorns and grew up, but eventually the thorns overpowered it and choked it out. But there was some other seed that fell on the good soil which actually produced grain.

After Jesus finishes telling this story to His disciples, they start looking at each other and saying, "Do you know what He's talking about?" "No, I was hoping you knew." So Jesus says, "Okay, boys, come here. Let Me explain what I'm talking about." He brings them in and starts explaining His parable by saying, "Listen, the seed represents the Word of God. The different soils are the different ways people respond to God's Word." I want us to listen carefully to one of the warnings Jesus gives here in Mark 4:18-20. In describing the seed thrown among the thorns, He says this:

They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit.

New Covenant Bible Church, let us heed Christ's warning to us this morning and not let the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word in our lives. We are busy people. There is always something else we could be doing. Christ's call to us is to prioritize well, to be those who, like the psalm writer, hear the Word and accept it, then bear fruit. So that's the warning. Now, the encouragement.

An Encouragement from God's Word

It is not your keeping of God's Word that makes you right with God. You see, left to yourself, you could never obey God like you should. You needed a Savior to do what you could not

do on your own. God, being rich in mercy, compassion, love and grace, has provided that Savior for you in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Just think through this Psalm in light of Jesus.

Jesus is the One Who guarded His way perfectly according to God's Word. Even when He was in the wilderness being tempted by the devil, He sought God with all His heart and never once wandered from God's commandments. Jesus stored up God's Word in His heart so that He never once sinned against His God (Psalm 119:11). Jesus' lips always overflowed with God's Word and His heart perfectly delighted in keeping God's law. Jesus meditated on God's precepts and never forgot God's Word.

After doing all of that, He willingly laid down His life to pay for our impurities, for all the times our hearts have wandered, for all the times we've sinned against our God. But then three days later He rose victorious from the grave, having conquered, beaten, destroyed sin on behalf of His people. Now, because of what Christ has accomplished, what God promised through the prophet Ezekiel is true of all of us who turn from our sins and trust in Him. So hear God's Word of grace to you this morning from Ezekiel 36. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ, this is true of you this morning. God says in verse 25, *"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean,"* you shall be pure before Me. *"From all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you."* I'll do that through the blood of My son. Verse 26, *"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone,"* that hard heart that doesn't obey Me, *"and give you a heart of flesh."* Then hear God's promise to you, New Covenant Bible Church, in verse 27: *"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*

Is a life of obedience and faithfulness to Christ possible for you today? Yes, this is the forgiving, transforming, life-changing power of the gospel at work in you today. So believe God's Word and work hard to store up His Word in your heart, so that you might not sin against Him.

Let's pray together.

O Father, we praise and thank You for Your Word. We thank You for life-changing power. We ask that we would be those who keep our lives according to Your Word. Father, we want to seek You with all of our hearts. We know that's what You promised us in Ezekiel 36. So give us an undivided heart. We want to be wholeheartedly devoted to You. Keep us from wandering from Your commandments. Give us grace to work hard to store up Your Word in our hearts, so that we might not sin against You.

Father, teach us to do Your Word. We delight in Your statutes. You are so good to us. I pray that You would continue to show each one of us Your amazing love, so that our hearts are drawn to love You more and more, that the appeal and temptations of sin would grow dim in light

of Your glory and grace. O Father, do these things in us, we pray, for our good and for the glory of Your Son Who lived, died and rose again to rescue us from sin. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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