

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part twenty-four

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YOU CAN EXPAND YOUR APPETITE FOR GOD'S WORD

Psalm 119:11 - "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."

It's a verse of Scripture that almost everyone can quote - especially in the KJV. If David were alive with us today, and you and I had the choice opportunity to ask him *how he became a "man after God's own heart,"* what do you think he would say? What was the secret of his spiritual greatness? Fortunately we don't have to guess. He *tells* us one of the richest secrets anyone can know. In this one short verse David stands up and says, "Here's the approach I took to becoming a man after God's own heart."

I want to know this. I don't have time to waste on fads and trends and things that simply don't work. I want a Godly heart. A Godly life *outwardly* comes from a Godly heart *inwardly* - **"I have stored up your work in my heart."** I'm convinced this is exactly what Jesus had in mind when, though using different words, He drilled down into the same truth about the Word stored up in the heart - **John 15:7-8 - "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. [8] By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."**

These are amazing words. They describe a spiritual root - God's Word - abiding *inside* my body, rather than on the pages of my Bible. Both David and Jesus are talking about knowing the Word *by heart*. And both say there is no possibility of transformation without this process. I can't abide in Jesus just by trying to *imitate* Him. They aren't just describing a **"What Would Jesus Do?"** approach. That's a spiritual *cop-out*. The life of our Lord can't be mimicked from the outside. It's **His words abiding in us** that create His life, by the Holy Spirit, *through us*.

This is the approach David discovered. And David, while not perfect, is certainly the man to give me directions. The verse divides up very neatly. First, there is a description of David's *practice* - **"I have stored up your word in my heart."** Then we have a picture of David's *aim or goal* in this practice - **"....that I might not sin against you"**

Today we're going to study **David's practice**. This divides into **two areas: First**, we have the **action David took** (**"....your Word I have stored...."**). Then, second, we see the **place where David treasured, or hid the word** (**"....in my heart...."**).

- 1) **First, look at the action David took - "I have stored up (or hid) your word in my heart."** While I'm certain most of us learned the KJV reading of this little verse, I want to take a minute to show why I think **storing** is really the idea David was trying to capture.

The idea of **hiding** God's Word, or hiding **anything**, for that matter, can be a little confusing. That's because there can be **two very different motives for hiding something**. First, you can hide something to **conceal it**, to keep anyone else from ever seeing it or finding it - **Psalm 40:10 - "I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation."**

This is the kind of hiding we are **not** to do. We don't hide God's Word to **keep it invisible and undiscovered**. This is the opposite of what David means. We don't hide God's Word like my wife hides my Christmas presents. This is not the intent of David at all in these famous words.

Second, you can hide something to **protect it - to keep it from being snatched away or lost**. This is the idea David is trying to capture. He hides God's Word in the sense that he **stores, or treasures** God's Word. He locks it up in his heart the way you lock up precious jewellery in a vault. He **tends** to God's Word the way you tend to something so precious that you would rather lose anything else than lose it. So David hid God's Word in his heart because he wanted it stored in a place where its **impact on his life** will not be diminished. He stored it up in the one place closest to his very existence.

Now, we've already come across more truth than most Christians seriously consider. We must not rush over this powerful idea. **Reading** the Bible isn't enough, even reading it very **regularly**. When David talks about **storing** or **hiding** God's Word in his heart he's talking about the steps he takes **after** he's read and studied the Word. He's talking about how he labours to **ponder over, memorize, and preserve** the Word in his heart. It's not the actual event of **reading** the Word that he's describing. He's talking about how he **locks it down**, how he **brings it to application**, how he **fastens** it to his life.

Jesus cautioned all of us about this same truth. In two very powerful passages of Scripture He outlines the threats - the **numerous** and **powerful** threats - to the life of the Word in our hearts once we've **received** it if we weren't careful about **hiding** it - **treasuring** it - in our hearts. I'm sure you all know these two warning passages. We've studied them together in this series:

Matthew 13:19 - "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path."

So the **entrance** of the Word doesn't ensure **benefit** from the Word. Away forever with the notion that it's enough to be **inspired** or even **blessed** by the Word. That's good, but it's not enough. Sometimes there can bubble up a lot of emotion around a faulty understanding of the text. This **feels** like spiritual health, but it isn't. Jesus is the teacher here, and He says if I don't **understand** the Word, and understand it **correctly**, it will not have any lasting influence in my life. At least not a **good** influence.

Then Jesus described other threats to the Word loosely fastened in my heart, even after it has been read: **Matthew 13:22 - "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."**

You can't store **everything** in your heart. Just like the earth orbits the sun, your life was so created by Father God that it can only orbit on one supreme treasure. And Jesus said we must constantly **uproot** (in the gardening metaphor) all competing objects of attention and affection.

Note how Jesus exposes the **greatest myth** about spiritual life and the things that **destroy** it's power. It's not just **bad** things that can kill spiritual life. All **secondary** concerns and priorities aggressively choke out kingdom concerns. They are naturally **cancerous** to the rule of God in my heart.

Because of this ever present danger, unlike David's picture of storing treasure, Jesus uses gardening imagery. It's a brilliant teaching move. **Weeding** is a wonderful picture of the activity of treasuring the Word in your heart because **weeding, as any gardener knows, is never done**. It's never a **completed work**. What clearer picture could be given to show what David meant when he outlined the need to **preserve** the Word in your heart **after** you're done reading it?

I said earlier that David described both a **practice** (storing the Word in the heart) and a **place where** he stored it (in the heart). Let's look for a minute at the place where David hides the Word:

- 2) **The heart is the place where David stored away the Word - "I have stored up your word in my heart..."** We should probably point out the obvious. Reading something and getting it into your heart are not the same thing. I've read thousands - millions - of things that aren't **in** my life in any way, shape, or form. I've read instructions for assembling things, programming things, road signs, and a host of other collections of letters and numbers that I have no knowledge of, nor interest in, whatsoever. So, for sure, David isn't talking here about merely **reading** the Bible.

More than anything else, the Word stored in the heart implies being **affected by its truth**. The Word stored in the heart means purposely **holding the Word dearly and carefully and consciously in such a place in your programming center that it regulates everything else in your life**. **Cherishing** is a good term for it. **Storing** is the one David chose.

Storing God's Word in your heart goes beyond **church attendance, promise boxes** or mere **Bible reading**. This is the most important thing about your inner life. There is nothing else that will shape your walk with God and your eternal destiny more than this. So any thoughtful person will want to ask the question: **"How can I know if I am storing God's word in my heart?"**

- a) **You are beginning to store up God's Word in your heart when you actually begin to love the entrance of God's wisdom into your life.** The Word begins to consume your time and pursuits. You can't get enough of it into your system. You begin to **cherish every opportunity to expose yourself to the entrance of God's Word**.

Proverbs 2:6-7, 9-10 - " For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; [7] he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;

he is a shield to those who walk in integrity....9-10....Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; [10] for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul....”

“Pleasant to your soul...” (10). Surely, this is a mark of a flourishing heart. God goes to all the trouble to **“store up wisdom for the upright” (2:7)**. So we can clearly see the value **He** places on His wisdom. Then, because we place the **same** value on God’s revelation **He** puts on it, the entrance of His truth becomes **“pleasant to our soul.”**

This signals a huge change in our constitution. **Psalm 1** declares that I used to delight in the **“counsel of the ungodly.”** I had no taste for the thoughts and ways of God. I would spend more time, with more excitement, in front of the television than in God’s house. Then the Spirit of God opened my heart to God’s Word. And, oh, what a sense of treasure began to develop in my soul - **“O how I love Thy law. It is my meditation day and night!”**

Speaking of God’s commands, David says, **“They are more to be desired than gold - the purest gold!”** Is that your evaluation? Remember, you measure any passion by what it takes to bump it out of the number one spot. Did you put as much energy into hiding God’s Word in your heart as you did in getting your gold last week?

- b) **You will know you are beginning to store up God’s Word in your heart when you begin to receive it with faith and submission.** I say **faith** and **submission** because you can’t really have one without the other. You have to **believe** that God’s Word is gold - that it really will increase the **value** of your life - or you will never **submit** your agenda and desires to its authority. Practically, here’s where faith must be exercised. Many times the teaching of the Word doesn’t **appear** instantly **beneficial** to our own eyes. It can seem hard and undoable. It almost always goes against our own fallen instincts. Only the heart of **faith** will yield its own judgment, postpone its own plans, die to its own goals, and **submit** to the Word.

And yet this is the only way the Word is stored or treasured properly in the heart. The Word becomes **settled** and **engrafted** (that’s the word James uses to describe the same process) in the heart when it is received with **faith and submission**.

- c) **You will know you are beginning to store up and treasure God’s Word in your heart when you begin to taste in your own soul an abiding affection for the ways of God over the long haul.**

This doesn’t happen all at once, and you don’t have to **pretend** that it does. But

over time, bit by bit, probably without even making it a conscious decision, you cease measuring your spiritual temperature by ***short term blazes and surges of emotion***.

Matthew 13:20-21 - “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, [21] yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

Jesus labors to distinguish between short-term and long-term effects of the Word in my life. There is a ***kind*** of response to God’s Word that carries a certain immediate ***“joy”*** - that’s the very word Jesus uses - but which quickly loses impact.

As I’ve been thinking about this I believe the difference is something like this. One approach to the Word is to go to it when something in my life is either ***pain*** producing or ***guilt*** producing. I know my life needs ***fixing*** at some point and I go to the Word to get help. When things go wrong in our lives we try to ***stop*** what we’re doing. We ***change our behavior***. Perhaps we change our environment, our friends.

And all of this is OK. It will be helpful to our souls, I’m sure. But they are the frantic, last minute scramblings of the spiritual amateur. I believe Jesus is calling us to recognize the crucial difference between ***altering our actions*** and ***transforming our thinking***. Before my life has a solid chance at ***permanent*** transformation I will need a totally new ***world-view***. The way I come to see and treasure and measure everything needs a radically new ***mind-set*** - a whole word-shaped ***perspective***.

On another occasion Jesus re-stated the same principle by saying our lives can’t be switched on and off and the last minute. We are formed by ***drawing out of the storage of our hearts*** - - **Matthew 12:35** - “The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” So our decisions aren’t driven merely by the need of the moment. Rather, our affections and plans and dreams are pumped up out of the storage of the Word of God - the treasure that’s been stored up in our hearts.

The person who learns to ***put his faith and trust in the truth of the Word*** can’t help but discover, in increasing measure and fullness over time, just how right and joyful the ways of God are, even when they didn’t ***appear*** to be so at first. This, in turn, brings greater ease in trusting God in quicker and more complete ways in the future. And the whole adventure snowballs in a beautiful fruitfulness as your soul expands and comes to life around the ways of God.

All of this brings a ***steadiness*** and ***consistency*** into your Christian walk: **Psalm**

1:2-3 - “....but his *delight* is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

People who know me well know I can't stand tulips. They look great and look crummy in the same two week stretch. I'm glad David pictured life in the Word like a tree. There is something special about a huge tree - say an oak tree. True, it takes longer to grow (unlike dandelions, they never arrive over night), but it looks good for such a long, long time. It's a ***steady beauty***.

God doesn't want to make you beautiful like a tulip. But His Word talks a great deal about ***trees***. God loves to ***plant trees*** - ***“He shall be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water....”***

“Pastor Don, my life doesn't look anything like that. I'm all over the map spiritually. I'm up and I'm down. I'm happy, then I'm confused and discouraged. I'm hot and then I'm cold. I'll never make it to the place you're describing today.”

Dear one, yes you can. But you have to make the start. Don't let the adventure scare you from starting. When you begin forming the storehouse of your heart you have to begin with a lot of sheer will-power. Later on, the Spirit will increase the momentum by working with the Word you've planted there.

The ***first*** important thing is to not procrastinate. And the ***second*** most important thing is to not quit. Spiritual weakness isn't primarily defined by ***failing too often***. It's defined by ***quitting too soon***. And we begin to understand in a deeper way why Jesus said ***“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples....”(John 8:31)***. So remember, the very ***best*** time to plant a great oak tree is twenty-five years ago. But the ***second best*** time is right now! Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!