

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part 25

Teaching #1991 - Sunday, September 10th, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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YOU CAN EXPAND YOUR APPETITE FOR GOD'S WORD (continued)

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

In the first part of this teaching we studied *David's practice* - "***I have stored up your word in my heart.***" We studied ***what*** David did. He ***stored up*** the Word. And we studied the ***place*** where he did this. He stored it up ***in his heart.***

We saw that by ***storing up*** God's Word, David was referring to something he did ***after*** he read God's Word (or heard it read to him). He meant ***preserving*** what had been sown in his heart. The process of ***ingesting*** God's Word - of getting all the spiritual ***nutrients*** out of it - doesn't end when the Bible is closed and put back on the shelf. Like all food, what is ***eaten*** must be converted into ***energy***. Eating is useless unless this happens. In your physical body it happens automatically - unless you're very sick. But it ***never*** happens automatically with God's Word. Storing the Word begins ***after*** you close the Book. David speaks of storing up the Word, not in the ***book***, but in the ***heart***. There is a sense in which you can be a great ***reader*** of God's Word and still never ***hide it, or treasure it, or store it up, in your heart.***

Then we looked at the ***place*** where David hid God's Word. "***I have stored up your word in my heart.***" This is what Jesus was describing in **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.***" It is also what James calls the ***"implanted Word"*** in **James 1:21** - "***Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***"

The Old King James uses the very descriptive word ***"engrafted"*** - "***...receive the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls.***" This is a very striking verb. It comes from the world of gardening. It refers to linking one kind of tree onto another in such a way that the life of the one flows into the other. James obviously means for us to think of the Word of God at work in our lives, but in the sense of the Word no longer being located merely between the leather covers of your Bible, but located now, in a living way, in the nerve center of your life. It's really a very striking picture. It's almost as though the Word switches locations. It moves from the paper of your Bible to the cells of your mind and heart.

This process is easier to read than to adequately describe. I'm referring to the process of ***being affected*** by a kind of ***constant remembering - a constant inward reminding.*** It's like a constant ***inward counterweight to my own instant desires.*** It's an application of divine truth that reorganizes my own reflex reaction. And it's ***at the same time*** a lot of mental work and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, all of this relates to the last part of our text. David didn't just read the Word aimlessly. He treasured the Word in his heart ***because*** he had made a wonderful discovery. He found, as he loved and studied the Word of God, a ***process*** taking place in his life. He found ***holiness*** forming in his life. He found ***changes*** taking place in his thoughts. He found his ***desires*** experiencing a noticeable metamorphosis. Things that were ugly were turning into things that were beautiful.

And he found ***freedom***. He found freedom from sins he thought would dominate his life forever. He could relate to the words of the apostle James in **James 1:25** - "***But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.***"

"The law of liberty." That's it exactly. Divine possibilities open up. The Word treasured in David's heart was unclogging the spiritual arteries of his heart. There was fresh power and life. So David treasured the Word with a purpose - "***I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.***"

1) STUDYING THE WORD WILL BE A DRY, EMPTY PROCESS UNLESS IT IS READ WITH AN EYE TO PERSONAL SIN

The reason I'm mentioning this emphasis in our text is this is not at all the way much of the contemporary evangelical church makes its approach to the Bible and the Christian life in general. Talk of sin has fallen on hard times among many Christians. It's seen as culturally outdated and usually legalistic. We've opted for a more reasonable, gentle and socially tolerant brand of holiness. This, we are told, is the "***new kind of Christian.***"

This is what is so instructive in David's words. He insists the Word of God immediately brought the whole concept of ***sin*** to life in his mind. He couldn't relish the Word without sin floating to the top of his attention. The Word of God made David instantly ***intolerant*** and ***ungenerous*** with his own sin.

This is what we need to relearn from this text. We need to see how, when David speaks of loving and valuing God's Word, he isn't just thinking of the beauty of its language or the power of its imagery or the greatness of its principles. He's thinking about sin. He's thinking about personal holiness. He's thinking about staying clean.

In other words, David wasn't just thinking about gaining ***information*** from the Word. Information is important. We certainly need sound and accurate ***understanding*** when we read our Bibles. I wouldn't argue against that for a moment. But David only saw these things as ***means to an end***. He treasured the Word to be kept from sin.

Again, it's so obvious from the teaching of the New Testament that David was not alone in this preoccupation with sin, holiness and the Word of God: **James 1:21-25** - "**Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. [22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.**"

This is a very carefully crafted visual lesson. The ***process*** of change is described in **verses 22-25**. But the ***objective*** of looking into God's Word is stated right up front in **verse 21**. James, just like David, says you pick ***up*** the Word to do ***away*** with sin.

James likens the Word of God to a ***mirror***. He paints a picture so ludicrous we all immediately relate to its point. What is the point in looking in a mirror and doing nothing about your appearance? What's a mirror ***for*** if not to take care of your appearance? Think about it. What do you use a mirror for? You use it when you get up in the morning before you go out to face the day. You use it to fix your hair, shave your face, or apply make-up. Really, there is no ***other*** purpose than this for a mirror.

In fact, if you think about it, you really don't look ***at*** a mirror at all. You look at ***yourself in*** the mirror. A mirror isn't made to look ***at*** any more than a window is made to look ***at***. You look ***through*** the window to see what's outside. And you look ***into*** the mirror to behold the one standing in front of it.

If you want the Word to do its designed work in your life, always read it with an eye to personal sin and holiness. That's what it was ***designed*** for. Look for ***good examples*** to follow. Look for ***bad examples*** to shun. Look for ***commands*** to obey. Look for ***promises*** to treasure. Look for ***warnings*** to heed. But always, always read with an eye to your own heart.

Remember, devotions become boring - they lose their fizz - when they become an ***end in themselves***. This is a huge problem in the church. Christians feel guilty about the smallness of time and the lack of frequency in their devotional habits. They feel guilty, but don't know what to do about it. They have bought into programs that measure devotional practice by the clock or by the number of chapters read. And all of these programs are fine as ***helps***. But the real issue being lost is the ***purpose*** of the devotions. I want to expand on this in the next point:

2) **THE WORD TREASURED IN THE HEART IS DESIGNED TO BE THE STORE OUT OF WHICH THE REST OF YOUR LIFE FLOWS.**

David gathered up the Word the way a squirrel gathers up nuts for winter. He *hid* the Word - he *stored* the Word - deep within his heart. And, as we're studying right now, he did this for a *purpose* - ***"that I might not sin against You."***

I want to look briefly at the process of ***how our lives are changed by the Word of God***. And David wasn't the only one in the Scriptures to address this issue. Jesus spoke of it very clearly: **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."**

Isn't it interesting that Jesus picks up David's actual word. He talks about the inward ***storage*** of the heart. Of course, there are good things in the heart and there are bad, but that's not the main issue of the passage. ***The main issue of this passage is that life doesn't just happen. And, even more importantly, its direction can't be determined at the last moment.*** That's the key issue for our discussion on holiness and the Word.

If all Christians understood the import of those words they would radically alter their devotional habits. Those words tell the secret of ***how change takes place*** in our lives - how we move into becoming freer, cleaner, holier men and women of God.

And the main point is that the way you live your life is determined differently than you may have perceived. David and Jesus are both teaching that the quality of your life isn't determined by your ***mental calculation*** ("I think this is my problem and if I just do this, I should be able to fix that up"), and the quality of your life isn't determined by ***moral resolution*** ("This year, I'm really going to be different!").

I wonder how well we grasp these points. I often wonder how many Christians live lives marked by either frustration or disappointment because they imagine the Christian life to be simply a matter of ***choosing to live life better than they have been***. Listen dear one, it will never work that way. Never.

I hope everyone will remember what I'm saying. There are basically ***two approaches*** to personal transformation and holiness. One will work with God's help and the other will never work in a million years. Let me start with the method that looks promising, but will never get off the ground.

- a) ***The method that will never work is the method of imitation.*** I enjoy watching golf on television. I can't tell you the number of times I have watched Jason Day blast a tee shot down the fairway with what, at least from my perspective, appears to be no effort at all. Then I say to myself, "See how easy that is, Don? Any fool can do it. He just takes that club back so smoothly and lets it go. That's what I'm going to start doing."

Usually my rounds of golf following those televised tournaments are very discouraging times for me. I drive home from Pheasant Run prepared to cut up my golf clubs into one inch pieces. Try as I might, I just can't hit the ball like Jason Day by sheer imitation.

This is the way many Christians go at their Christian walk. They hear in some sermon that they are to love their enemies, turn the other cheek, bear with others without malice or revenge, and they say to themselves, ***"That's what I'm going to do!"*** And off they go. Only they can't stand their enemies. They would rather die than turn the other cheek. And if they thought they could get away without being caught, they'd pound their enemy into the ground and then leave him a tract!

And over time, if they continue with this approach of simply trying to ***imitate*** personal holiness they see or hear about in others, one of two things is going to happen. Either they will feel ***condemned and***

guilty, knowing they are merely **pretending** to be something they are not, **or** they will conclude that their failure is due to the fact that Christianity is merely another man-made religion that simply won't work for them, and they'll give it up.

- b) ***The second method for personal transformation in holiness is the principle David outlined as "storing up God's Word in your heart," or Jesus described as "laying up store within."***

To go back to my golf illustration, I can never **imitate** my way into playing like Jason Day, but I can improve vastly, if I'm willing to take the time and put out the effort, if I **assimilate, learn and practice** the principles Jason and others have made available to the average golfer.

There are some things that can never come by imitation. They can only come by inwardly assimilating, exercising, developing, and then **living out** what has been stored up over time on the inside: **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."**

It is as we remember all of this that we see the sense of Paul's instruction to Timothy that he should **"exercise himself unto Godliness."** What wonderful words! You may or may not feel that Godly yet. You may have a long way to go. But that's not the point. You can start **exercising** now. You can immediately start to build up in the heart what you want to see fleshed out in the life.

Remember, Jesus said everything that is to come in your path to Christlikeness must be **drawn out of what you have laid up already in your heart**. This is why He described His words as **living bread** rather than a **moral list**. There is almost nothing more important to remember than this.

Do you look up the commands of Scripture when you come to some point of failure and fresh resolution and try to tack them on to the outside of your life and fill them out as best you can? Or have you taken the whole life-style of discipleship - the habits, exercises and nutrients that make the commands keepable?

The difference between those two approaches is enormous. It's the difference between some goofball who just wants to try to smash mammoth drives like Jason Day and the methodical player who gives himself to driving range practice.

This is what Jesus is saying, and it's also what the psalmist is teaching. Actions are determined by the **storeroom of your heart**. You can't make **outward actions** rise any higher than the level of what you've put **inside your heart**. This is what the Holy Spirit will work with, and this is how you cooperate with Him.

- 3) **WE NEED TO REMAIN ALERT TO ONE DANGER THAT IS COMMON TO ALL WHO WALK WITH JESUS**

Simply put, the danger is we can **lose the edge of our sense of urgency to keep God's Word stored up (treasured) in our hearts**. I don't mean by this that we love God any less or that we **intend** to let Him down or fail Him in any way. From all outward appearances everything is fine and current in our walk with Jesus. There is no crisis. No glaring need.

And that's the dangerous point. There is nothing external to **press** us into devotional hunger and persistence. The sky doesn't fall if you don't go to church regularly. You can say grace before meals even if you have been neglecting your quiet time in your office or den.

The perception of our need for God's Word can become numbed. And this can happen with no change whatsoever in our ***view of God's Word.*** We still know it *is* God's Word. We would never deny it. We acclaim its importance. We defend its authority. We listen to it when it's preached. I'm not talking about any of those things when I say it's easy to find our perception of our own ***need*** for the Word to be stored up in our hearts. ***I simply begin, very gradually, to live my Christian life on the energy of my own intelligence and will-power.*** And, ***for a while,*** this approach can ***feel*** almost the same as abiding in the vine of Jesus' life and words.

But sooner or later there arises a problem with this approach. We will constantly be repeat sinners in the face of the same temptations. And that's because my moral will-power only addresses my ***outward actions.*** Only God's Word starts the work on the much deeper level of ***transforming my tastes and desires.***

James gives the clearest picture of how this process unfolds. James tells us ***where*** the power of temptation comes from - **James 1:14-15** - ***"...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."***

The important point here is the power of temptation doesn't come from any source ***outside*** yourself. The problem of sin isn't rooted in any object or situation ***outside*** yourself. Temptation comes from your ***inward desires.*** Sin starts ***inside*** your own skin. That's why the Word and the Spirit need to gradually reshape my ***desires.***

Because David recognized this He knew the virtual uselessness of the Word printed on the pages of the Bible. That's the whole point of our opening text - **Psalm 119:11** - ***"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."***

Put the Word of God in the ***same place*** where all your sins originate. Store up the Word of God ***where your desires are formed.*** Let it ***live*** there by the way you ***think*** about it. Pray it to life every day - ***in advance of the temptation to sin*** - because when temptation becomes intense we don't ***see*** the wickedness of our own desires. If the Word of God doesn't have at least the same inward impact that your own desires do you will never stand. So heed this one-verse reminder from David. We're going to need it. Because once you and I commit ourselves to follow Jesus, listen to the Holy Spirit, and live in the Word, we begin to ***exercise*** ourselves unto Godliness. And any exercise can occasionally find its levels of un-excitement. When those times come, remind yourself of a truth that every serious exerciser knows. After you have conditioned your life around a certain regimen, ***when you've reached a certain level of inward conditioning,*** you will find you do not feel as immediately effected by continuing to ***do*** the program as you are by ***stopping*** the program.

That means the battle is one of ***persistence.*** Remember, you will notice the effects of ***stopping*** the exercise more immediately than you will notice the increasing benefit of ***continuing*** the exercise. So stay at storing up the Word. Spiritual weakness isn't defined primarily by ***failing too often*** as much as it is by ***quitting too soon.*** Store up the Word in your heart. Keep treasuring it. It's like making consistent deposits into the most important account of your life.