

**"The Word-Lover's Heart"
(Psalm 119:161-168)
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¹⁶¹ Rulers persecute me without cause,
but my heart trembles at your word.
¹⁶² I rejoice in your promise
like one who finds great spoil.
¹⁶³ I hate and detest falsehood
but I love your law.
¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous laws.
¹⁶⁵ Great peace have those who love your law,
and nothing can make them stumble.
¹⁶⁶ I wait for your salvation, LORD,
and I follow your commands.
¹⁶⁷ I obey your statutes,
for I love them greatly.
¹⁶⁸ I obey your precepts and your statutes,
for all my ways are known to you.

We're now at the second to last section of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible and the entire psalm is about the beauty of the word of God. Of the 176 verses you can count on one hand the ones that have no direct mention of the word of God. Throughout this series we've looked a lot at the theme of suffering. That was not my intent. Rather this is the theme the psalmist kept bringing us back to. And this section is no different. It too mentions suffering in the form of persecution. My hope and prayer for us all is that we wouldn't fail to go to God's word in times difficulty. At the same time, my hope and prayer has been that each of us, especially if you consider yourself a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ, that your interaction with the word of God has grown. I think we can measure it in a couple of ways.

1. Has your love and appreciation for the word of God grown? We love the word of God because it is the very words of God for us. We love it because in it, God has revealed what otherwise could not have been known about God. He has revealed himself. He has revealed his purpose. And in the word of God we discover who we are.
2. Has your interaction with the word of God grown? Are you reading it more frequently? Are you trusting it more? Are you meditating more deeply on it? Are you doing what it says? Are you a better listener of sermons? Are you more attentive to the word at Bible studies? Are you submitting more to its authority? Are you seeing Jesus more and more in the pages of Scripture?

If your answer to at least one or more of those things is yes, then I'm happy and it's a sign that you are growing in your faith. But if it's no, then I think you have to do one or two things. The first thing you have to do is to repent. Think of it like this. *I remember just last week, I was texting my wife, and it was something that was time sensitive and she wasn't replying, and I was getting irritated and angry even, and we got into a small argument that lasted a couple of minutes and I blurted out, "just say sorry!"* In the same way, God has spoken to us in his word, he's messaged us, and if you're not opening his book, if you're not reading his messages, then it is an offense to him. It is a sin to ignore God in this way.

The second thing you have to do is discern if you are a Christian. You may be a person who's been going to church all or most of your life. And you may think you're a Christian because your parents were Christian and your grandparents were Christian, and your aunties and uncles are Christian, so that must mean that you too are Christian. Even though there is great advantage to being raised in a Christian family and surrounded by Christian relatives and friends, there is no faith transmission by osmosis. There is no such thing as the automatic genetic transfer of faith from one generation to another. The Bible tells us that true faith is known by its fruit. What does that mean? It's a change in attitudes, appetites and ambitions.

So, if you have no desire to read God's book, to listen to his messages, that's an indication that you are probably not a Christian. When God makes someone a Christian, one of the major things he does, is that he gives us a new heart. The heart, in the Bible, is the center of a person. It's the very core of who a person is. This is where our attitudes, appetites and ambitions are. And when we become a Christian and receive that new heart, those things begin to change. Some right away and some more gradually. So consider your appetites for a moment. One of the appetites that God gives us is for his word. Listen to this one verse in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. **(1 Corinthians 2:14)**

I hope those two things have happened in you. That you love God and his word and your interaction with it is deeper than ever.

Now, Let me walk you through this passage verse by verse. Look to your Bibles with me. In verse **161**, the psalmist writes that rulers persecute him without cause "...but my heart trembles at your word."

Let's consider what he's saying. People in very powerful positions are persecuting him. They have the power to do as they please with him... to interrogate him...to imprison him...to torture him...perhaps even to kill him. Now that would be something to dread or tremble over. *I've only trembled in fear once in my life. I was a stupid high school kid and my friends and I decided to go into a dark forest to smoke something we shouldn't be smoking. And while we were doing our thing, we saw a couple of flashlights approaching, and before we knew it two policemen were interrogating us, asking what we were doing. And then they began to search us, going around one by one, emptying our pockets. That's when I began shaking, because I had on me a device used to smoke something we shouldn't be smoking. And my knees started knocking and shaking so hard, I thought I was gonna lose it. Never before and never since have my knees knocked in fear.*

Okay, back to the Bible verse. The verse is saying this. If you and I were in this situation, we would be trembling, shaking in our boots, peeing our pants. But not so the psalmist. What does he tremble at, what does he stand in awe of? **THE WORD!** Does that sound foolish to you? Does that sound ridiculous to you? Listen to the words of our Savior:

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” **(Luke 12:4-5)**

Is that you? Have you ever had an encounter with the Word of God so great that it wrecked you? Have you had an Isaiah moment? “Woe to me! I am ruined!” Or a Peter moment, “Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man!” This is the heart of a woman, a man, who loves God and His word.

Let’s look at verse **162**. “I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil.”

Now, we can all relate to this. Here are some of the ways you might rejoice in wealth:

1. You find a hundred dollar bill in the middle of the street.
2. You get a fat raise or bonus.
3. Your investments are doing surprisingly well.
4. You get an inheritance.
5. You just bought your dream home or car.

But, what this verse is saying, is the surprise of finding great spoil. Most of the things I just mentioned are things that we to some degree plan. We plan to buy a new car, a new home. We expect that we’ll get a raise or bonus. But finding great spoil in our day and age is very very rare. It’s so rare that when it happens it makes the news. It’s often times like this. A family buys an old home and while they’re remodeling or rummaging through the attic, they find something of incredible worth, like a painting or a box of cash or an antique or something like that. That’s the kind of rejoicing he’s talking about.

Now, I don’t think this verse is criticizing celebrating at the receiving of wealth. It’d be a bit weird if it made you sad. Why are you so depressed? Oh, I got a raise. It’s very natural to celebrate at the receiving of great wealth. You get a new car, there’s a happiness. You’re told you have to pay more taxes, there’s disappointment and maybe even anger. So this response is a very natural and normal human response. And the psalmist is saying, the rejoicing that people have when they suddenly, unexpectedly get wealth, is the rejoicing I have when I discover the truths in God’s word. How can that be? Because the truths in God’s word are far superior than material blessings. It brings us to a knowledge of God. It shows us our true purpose. It tells us the way of salvation. It provides for us benefit for now and eternity.

Here’s how Jesus himself explains it:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. **(Matthew 13:44-45)**

One of the amazing things about the Bible is that you could have been reading it for 20 years. I’ve been a Christian since 1988. I started reading the Bible in 1987, so I’m at 30 years of reading the Bible. I think I’ve read it over 25 times in those 30 years. And do you know what? There’s never a year where I don’t say, “Wow, I never knew that!” “Hmm, I never saw that before.” Or “Oh yeah, I forgot about that.” And it’s such a joy to discover those things. Does that describe your heart?

163 – I hate and detest falsehood, but I love your law.

The word ‘hate’ is a very strong word. Here’s how it’s used in the Old Testament. It’s sometimes translated to mean ‘enemies’. Other times it’s used to mean ‘hostile’. Still other places it’s translated ‘not receiving love’. It’s the same word that Joseph’s brothers had toward him.

When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him. (**Genesis 37:4**)

And then on top of the word hate, he adds the word detest.

They're similar yet different words. If you say, I hate dogs, but I detest cats. It's much stronger isn't it? The Bible translates this word as "despise, vile, repulsive, abhor, loath, reject, degrade."

It's as if the psalmist caught himself not using a strong enough word. I hate falsehood. Actually 'hate' is not a strong enough word. What I meant to say is I DETEST falsehood.

If your 5 year old in his tantrum said, "I hate you mommy!" We'd get a little upset, but laugh it off, right? But, if your 5 year old said, "I detest you mommy!" First you'd say, where did you learn that word? But, then you'd be in utter horror at what she said. "I revile you mommy. I abhor you mommy." Okay, you get the picture.

The psalmist says, "I detest falsehood." If there's one thing that makes me sick to my stomach it's falsehood. If I had to pick one thing to hate more than any other thing, it'd be falsehood. Why? Why such strong language against lying?

The answer is seen in the next line, "But I love your law." I love your law because it is true. I hate falsehood because it goes against your word. I hate falsehood because you, God are a God of truth. In fact, you are the embodiment of truth. Remember what John says in his gospel regarding Jesus? In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. This Word, this Jesus then said, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." A person cannot love God, love Jesus, love his word and in the same heart, in the same person, love falsehood, cheating, lying, dishonesty.

So, in our workplaces, places filled with falsehood, cheating, lying, and dishonesty, we must love the truth. We must detest, abhor, be disgusted at falsehood. Is that also in your heart?

164 – Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. The number seven in the Bible is the number of wholeness, completeness. So over and over again, as a pattern of my life in God, I thank him, praise him for his word. We thank God for Sola Scriptura as we did recently at our concert of prayer, where praying through the Five Solas. Well, the first one was Sola Scriptura and these were the things we prayed:

- Thank God for his perfect, holy, and inerrant word. Thank God that all Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.
- Thank God for all his precious promises to us that are found in the Bible and are ours to claim in Christ Jesus.
- That God would awaken in our (my) hearts a deeper love for his holy word.
- That this love for the word, would lead to reading, studying, meditating, memorizing, and listening to it, with great joy, delight and obedience.
- That we would cease doubting what it says and place our utmost confidence in its truth.
- That our church (and the churches in our city) would hold to a high view of Scripture and preach boldly from it.

165 – Great peace have those who love your law. And nothing can make them stumble. All of us want peace, but often times peace alludes us, and we live with anxiety and stress. I think you will agree with me that for many of us living in the modern world as modern people, much of the anxiety and stress is self-inflicted. We like to believe that we're all victims of circumstance, but the truth is that the stress we go through is brought upon by ourselves. Why is there no peace during exam week? Because you didn't study the entire semester. Why do I stress so much over my children, over my appearance, over my identity? It is really circumstances? Often times the stress comes because we allow non-truths to become truths. We start believing things that are not true.

So, you may start believing things like...if you don't find your lifelong love partner, then you'll be forever incomplete. If your children don't succeed, then you'll be ruined and people will look down on you. We believe those things and we lose our peace. All of those statements are lies. They are all falsehoods. And we are to loathe and hate all falsehoods.

So, what then do we need to do? We need truth that comes from God's word. The Bible, more than any other source, gives us the peace we need. Because we find the truth, and when we learn the truth, love the truth, and apply the truth, the result is peace. True, deep, inner peace. We gain a new perspective. But it's not enough just to go to the Bible as a self-help book, it says we must love the law. We must place our complete confidence and trust in it. We must obey it and do what it says. This too is in the heart of the person who loves God's word.

166 – I wait for your Salvation, LORD, and I follow your commands. Some translations say, I hope for your salvation.

If you were waiting for God's salvation to come to you, what would you do? What would be the "and" after the first statement for you? "I wait for your salvation, Lord AND ... I'm living in drunken revelry." "I wait for your salvation Lord, and trying to make as much dishonest gain as possible." "I wait for your salvation Lord, and treasuring all my riches here on earth." "I wait for your salvation Lord, and ruining as many relationships as possible." "I wait for your salvation Lord, and living my entire existence on social media." I don't think any of those two statements go together, but what about these?

"I wait for your salvation Lord, and I'm going on missions."

"I wait for your salvation Lord, and I'm sharing the gospel on my campus."

"I wait for your salvation Lord, and I'm leveraging my finances for your Kingdom."

"I wait for your salvation Lord, and I'm living a holy life."

167/168 – I obey your statutes for I love them greatly. I obey your precept and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you.

What is the psalmist getting at here? What is the connection between obeying God's laws and all of our ways being known to God? Calvin mentions a couple things.

1. Knowing that God is omniscient, that he knows everything serves as a motivation to obey God. Consider it like this. If Jesus was in the room with you, would you cheat on your taxes, look at porn, scream at your spouse, be idle all day? Of course not. But get this, Jesus is in the room with you. In fact he's in you. To be a Christian is to have union with Christ. This also becomes one of the keys to our sanctification and holiness. Sanctification doesn't come about the best by just trying harder. It actually comes about the best when we become more aware, and deeper in our union with Jesus. How do I know that? Well because Jesus himself told us. John 15:5 I am the vine you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in them, they will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.

2. The second thing Calvin says is that this verse might be helping us to remember that God is judge. He sees everything. Nothing we do is hidden from his sight. And we will all be held to account, even for every word that we've spoken.

The presence of God with us in Christ, mediated through the Holy Spirit is to serve as a motivation, and a power to obey God's laws.

Conclusion:

What can give us a heart like that? Can we manufacture that? Can we just tell ourselves to change our attitudes toward the Word of God and then it'll change? No we can't. Apart from God changing our hearts first, we can never produce a heart like that. But once God does give us new hearts, we can and should display all the qualities we mentioned today.

How do you get a new heart? Let me take you back to verse 166. "I wait for your salvation Lord. Do you know what the Hebrew word for salvation is? Yeshuah. Do you know what the name of our Savior is? Yeshua. What did the angel say to Joseph? You are to give him the name Jesus, Yeshua because he will save people from their sins." Only Jesus can take a heart of stone and make it into a heart of flesh. Only Jesus can take a heart that is resistant to God and make it love God. Only Jesus can take a heart that disregards the Word of God and make it your greatest treasure. Trust in Jesus today. Invite him into your life.

Let's pray.