

## Guarding Your Life With God's Word

Psalm 119:9-16

About a year ago our family spent the day together at a place called 'The Factory' in London.

They call it 'The Factory' because the building was the Kellogg Cereal Factory which had been at that location for the better part of ninety years.

Sadly, the company decided to close that factory in 2014 leaving the massive building idle, but it did not sit unused for a very long time.

An investment group bought the building in 2016 and began renovating it with the idea of turning it into a tourist destination.

One of the main attractions at the facility is the ropes course and trampoline park.

It is the highest indoor ropes course in North America according to their website.

If you have enough courage you can climb almost to the top and ride a zip line from one end of the massive room to the other, climb through another section of rope course and then zip line back again to get down.

As you might imagine safety is a priority on the ropes course.

Every participant wears a helmet and a safety harness and has to participate in a short lesson on how to use the safety equipment and during the lesson everyone has to demonstrate the proper technique for moving from point to point on the obstacles.

On top of that, there are staff members placed at different parts of the course to keep an eye on people to make sure the rules are being followed.

It seemed to me, as I watched, that most people listened to and followed the instructions they were given.

I think most people understood that their life depended on their harness catching them if they happened to slip.

I think most people understood that the safety equipment and following the instructions was keeping them safe from harm.

That picture of a safety harness came to my mind as I considered the second section of Psalm 119.

This section opens with a question. It says in verse 9, "How can a young man keep his way pure?"

Another way to say it would be, 'How can a young man keep his life from being corrupted by evil?'

The focus on the young here does not mean that these verses only apply to young people, it is just to say that young people stand to gain the most from the counsel given to us here.

We know from the Bible that God is incredibly forgiving and gracious.

It is only because of His immeasurable kindness in Christ that there is any hope for us at all.

We also know that forgiveness does not always immediately remove the natural consequences of evil choices.

The only way to steer clear of that kind of self-inflicted pain is to stay away from making those choices in the first place.

That is the heart behind this question. Now look at the answer (**Verse 9**).

[Do you want to keep your life from ruin on account of bad choices? Guard your 'way'/life according to the word of God. The Bible is like a safety harness that keeps us from falling into spiritual ruin. The rest of this section of Psalm 119 shows us what it practically looks like to guard our lives with the Scriptures. As we stand at the beginning of 2025 this is a great place to turn our attention. What does it look like to guard our lives with the bible? How do we steer clear of things that are bad for us and those around us? Let's look together at this portion of the Bible and see firstly that...]

**Point #1 – Seeking God in His Word by His Grace keeps people from sin. (Verses 10-12)**

A deep desire to be close to the LORD is the most effective way to distance ourselves from the things that are evil and destructive.

We see both the seeking and the grace in verse 10.

When we see writers in the bible refer to the 'heart' they are most often referring to the will or desire of a person.

That is likely the meaning here. He is saying that he has a consuming desire to know God for Who He truly is.

He doesn't want a god that he has made up in his mind, he wants to understand the LORD as He is right up to the limit of his capability.

How can that happen? How can a mere human being understand the One Who made all things and is above all things?

The only possible way is for God to make Himself known.

That is exactly what we see in this verse.

Look at the plea he is making here. He says, 'Let me not wander from your commandments!'

God has given 'commandments', meaning He has spoken to people about who He is and how He wants us to live.

That in and of itself is grace, but the psalmist here knows he needs more grace.

He knows his fallen nature, if left to himself, would lead him off in the wrong direction and so he pleads with God to keep him walking in obedience.

That is an amazing way to pray!

We see the evidence of his seeking in **verse 11**.

It is very important for us to see, as one commentator puts it, that there is more here than simply memorizing bible verses.

Of course committing God's word to memory here is essential to his point, but it is more than that.

Notice he does not say, "I have hidden your word in my mind."

Again that is important to the process, but he uses the heart here to show us that this is more than information filed away in the mind.

Since the 'heart' in biblical language is referring to person's will/desire, he is saying that he has stored up God's word in himself in such a way that it is governing his will/desire which keeps him from sin.

It is also very important to highlight that his aim is to not sin against God.

There is no such thing as a sin that is not against God.

Everything and everyone belongs to the LORD and so when we misuse material things or when we act in evil ways towards others we are acting against the Almighty.

I can't help but wonder how differently we might act towards other people if we kept at the forefront of our minds that they belong to God.

That is what the psalmist is aiming for here, he is aiming to have his conduct and desires in his day to day life governed by the knowledge and application of God's word.

In order for that to happen he needs more than the ability to recite verses from the bible. (**Verse 12**).

He has this incredible desire to know God through His Word, which turns him to worship.

He praises God and then says, "...teach me your statutes!"

Wait a minute! He just said that he has stored up the word of God in his heart, why is He asking God to teach him something He already knows?

Because he knows that this is more than being able to recite words it is about understanding those words rightly and rightly applying them to life.

He doesn't come to his bible content to come up with his own meaning. He comes to his bible wanting to know God's meaning.

God's word doesn't mean whatever we want it to mean.

If we want to understand it properly we need grace. We need to take off our self-centered glasses and plead with God to teach us.

That is a prayer of glorious humility that I believe God is happy to answer according to His kindness.

[Just think about Jesus teaching on prayer in Matthew 7. He says, "...which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" If we come to God's word seeking to know Him, seeking to have His word be in our minds in such a way that it affects how we live from day to day, He will be gracious to us, He will honour His word and keep us from evil. In order for that to happen we need something. This kind of seeking God, this kind of desire for His Word comes from something more than just determination and will power. As the psalmist continues to teach us about guarding our lives with God's word he shows us that...]

**Point #2 – Delighting in God's commands protects people from temptation. (Verses 13-14).**

When we see and experience the goodness of the LORD's instruction it dulls the attraction of ungodly things.

*In the ancient world books were accessed much differently than they are today.*

Today books can be printed by machines and made available on a massive scale.

In the ancient world writing materials were not as readily available and everything had to be copied by hand.

That is one of the many things that makes the preservation of the Bible so remarkable.

Thousands of copies across long periods of time was a massive undertaking and has left us with a clear picture that the Scriptures have been reliably handed down to us.

The difficulty of copying and preserving books meant that the average person in Israel only possessed small portions of writing such as those commanded in Deuteronomy six.

To hear the whole of God's word they gathered in larger groups to listen to and recite the scriptures.

**Verse 13** gives us a picture of that.

*One of the things he likely has in mind with the word 'declare' is publically reading God's word.*

The author of psalm 119 is most likely either a king of Israel (Older commentators like Matthew Henry believe David is the author), or he is a priest.

There are multiple examples in the Bible of the people being gathered for the public reading of the word.

This psalmist says, "[he] declares ALL the rules" that come from the mouth of God.

Nothing is to be left out or unsaid because it is all important.

He understands that God is not looking for editors, he wants people to hear the complete word of God.

Besides public reading he probably also has in mind personally reciting the LORD's commands.

There is something powerful that happens when the word of God is spoken out of our own mouth and travels back into our ears.

Even secular sources recognize the benefits of reading out loud. Two big ones are it filters out distractions and it helps us to remember what we are reading.

You don't even have to do it loudly to benefit from it, I find even reading at a whisper level is enormously beneficial.

The sense of the verse is that this is something that is happening regularly.

The word of God is constantly coming out of his mouth.

That implies something that is confirmed in **verse 14**.

This is more than an obligation, it is his joy to 'declare' God's word both publically and privately.

It is important to clearly see the level that he takes this to.

When he says he delights in God's testimonies as much as all riches, he means that there is nothing in the world that is more valuable, there is nothing in the world that gives him more joy and satisfaction than the word of God.

That is incredibly significant in terms of 'keeping [your] way pure'.

You actually have to believe in the goodness of God's ways.

If you can genuinely see the value of God's word and if you can truly feel delight in His commands then the power of temptation becomes much smaller.

[Has anybody here ever spoiled their supper by eating something beforehand? I've been guilty of that on more than one occasion. I have noticed though that almost never happens when supper is something I really like. In fact, if I know supper is going to be a glorious feast I will skip lunch and on one or two occasions I have even skipped breakfast as well because I am so looking forward to supper. On a day like that you can't get me to eat something else ahead of time because I am looking forward to something much better.]

It is the exact same way with the word of God and sin.

If I see God's word as just a list of rules that we have to keep, then we will carry it as a burden and it will have little power to keep us from temptation.

If we are trying to fight against evil in our lives by list keeping it will be limited to trying not to do, think, say, or feel something that we are not supposed to.

If all we have is trying NOT to do something you can pretty much guarantee that we will give into temptation and do the thing we are trying to avoid.

This text is showing us a better way.

If we can see and feel the goodness of God's word, if we believe that there is nothing better than God's way, then we move from just trying to avoid evil to pursuing what is right.

When that happens in our hearts, then temptation loses a lot of its power.

[There is an old saying, "Everyone has their price." It means if enough worldly things are offered you can get anyone to compromise their principles. That is not true if we treasure God's word more than everything in all creation. If you feel stuck in a rut with some kind of sin in your life, plead with the LORD that the Spirit would give you a delight for His Word. That will change everything. The power of delighting in the Scriptures leads us into verses 15-16 of this psalm. What we see in these verses, I think, is the outworking of seeking God and delighting in His commands. We see that...]

**Point #3 – Carefully considering God's word has lasting effects. (Verses 15-16)**

When we diligently exercise our minds in the truth of Scripture it tends to stay with us shaping how we think, speak, and act in the world.

*Verse 15 reminds us that guarding our lives with God's word takes an investment of time.*

The Biblical idea of meditation is to consider, think upon, ponder, or study something.

It means to have something rolling around in our minds for the purpose of coming to a deeper understanding of its meaning.

One of the many things I love about the Bible is that it is for the most part understandable.

Yes some parts are more difficult than others, but a great deal of it is plain in its meaning.

At the same time there is depth to the word of God that can captivate the most brilliant of minds.

Now, it is very important to think rightly about the depth of the Scriptures.

A deeper/fuller/clearer understanding of a text is not a contradictory understanding of the text.

*The Bible does not have one surface meaning and another secret code underneath that is only revealed to a select few.*

Instead, it is like a building that looks impressive from the outside and once you step inside you are even more amazed.

[I had that experience at the ARK exhibited in Kentucky. Anybody been there? When I was standing outside I was impressed with how big it is, but walking inside I got a much fuller appreciation for how it was made and held together, but nothing I found inside changed the what I perceived it to be from the outside.]

That is what carefully considering God's word does for the believer.

That takes time. That is why he says "I fix my eyes on your ways" meaning he is consistently focusing his attention on the LORD's instructions.

How do we do that practically speaking?

As I mentioned last week, it is important to have a reading plan that takes you through the scriptures cover to cover.

If you haven't done that yet I want to encourage you again to get a plan and start that today.

The more you read the more you will have the big picture in your mind.

As you are doing that from pick out a verse or two or a small paragraph on a regular basis and consider it carefully.

How do you do that? It starts by reading it over a number of times and as you are doing that make observations and ask good questions.

See if there are repeated words, think about the surrounding context of the verses, and think about the main point of what is being said.

Ask, "What do I learn about God? What do I learn about people? How might this apply to my daily life?" and so on.

Talk to other people about the passage, ask "How have other believers down through the ages understood the text", and so on.

Somebody might say, "That sound like a lot of work?"

Yes it does take time but it is worth it to have your life guarded by the Scriptures.

Now look at what he adds in **verse 16**.

Again he mentions delight which suggests a connection.

Meditating on God's word is the natural result of delighting in God's word and meditating on God's word, which enables someone to see more of the glory of God's word, is going to cause more delight in God's word.

I think that is why he says what he does at the end of verse 16, he says, "I will not forget your word."

That is the natural effect of the storing up, declaring, delighting, and meditating on the Scriptures.

God's word gets fixed into your mind and therefore has an ongoing effect.

*That benefits every believer no matter what your age, but the sooner you start the longer and greater the effect.*

It is important to say that we should not compare ourselves to others in this pursuit.

Some people would say, "I'm not smart enough for this kind of thing." Listen, that is not true.

If you can read you can do this. If you have a hard time reading you can access audio bibles for free. (Biblegateway.com)

Some people would say, "I know more than other people so I can put God's word on the shelf and coast my way into heaven." Also, not true.

*God knows the mind and abilities He has graciously given each one of us.*

Let's do our best with that!

I wholeheartedly believe that if we apply ourselves by grace through faith to this endeavor then the LORD will be faithful to His Word and to His people and that will have a tremendous lasting effect on our lives.

Nothing will get the word of God into your heart and mind in a more lasting impactful way than when we take the time to carefully think upon its meaning.

*We need that desperately brothers and sisters.*

We need the word of God guarding our lives from day to day.

If you belong to Christ by faith this morning, then praise God you have been justly forgiven for the countless times you have broken God's laws.

That is our only hope to be right with God. We never earn that and nothing we do ever adds to the work of Jesus.

Living out Psalm 119 has nothing to do with making ourselves right with God, it has everything to do with enjoying God's work of salvation in us.

Until Jesus comes, believers on the earth have to live in a fallen world. Satan is still seeking our harm and our sin nature is still at war with the work of the Spirit in our lives.

We need the safety harness of God's word in our lives.

We need to seek God in His word by His grace, we need to delight in His commands, and we need to carefully consider the Scriptures, because doing these things by God's grace through faith will keep us safe in Christ until He comes.