

God's Word: A Help Against Sin

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[0:00] Psalm 119. We'll begin reading in verse 9. You may keep your Bibles open to Psalm 119.

A biography is an account of someone's life written by someone else. An autobiography is an account of a person's life written by that person themselves.

And Psalm 119 is neither a biography nor an autobiography. It's rather like a devotional diary recording David's inmost thoughts and prayers to God.

Thoughts and prayers that all have to do with God's Word. And as such, it becomes the most valuable chapter of the Bible for us as a Christian.

Because by it, we're allowed right into David's heart to listen in on his conversations with the living God about his Word. And we hear what he thinks about God's Word.

[1:48] How he values it. What he does with it. Why he loves it. And so it becomes something of a template for us to measure our own heart towards God's Word.

What do you say to God about his Word? What do you think about it? How do you value it? What do you do with it? Why do you love it?

So let's not compare ourselves with the generally low spiritual, low level of spirituality that's found today. Here's a better example to follow.

A man after God's own heart. An example that God himself has recorded in Scripture for us to examine and to imitate. David says to God, seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. And we're noting the reasons why. And this morning it's because God's Word helps us in our battle with sin. Why does David praise the Lord continually for his Word?

[2:57] Because it helps us with our battle with sin. Our text is verses 9 through 11. How can a young man keep his way pure?

By living according to your Word. I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Now sin is the breaking of God's commandments. It's doing what God forbids. It's not doing what he commands.

And so sin is belittling God's authority over us. It's offending his holiness. It's ingratitude for his daily mercies to us. It's rebelling against his government.

And it's despising his justice and tempting his wrath. Sin's wages are death. Not only the physical death. But then the second death.

[4:02] The everlasting punishments due to sin. There is a hell to pay for sin. So sin is serious. And yet, it's of no real concern to the unconverted.

The Bible says they drink down sin like water. There's no fear of God before their eyes. For in their own eyes, they flatter themselves too much to detect or even hate their sin.

Oh, but it's of great concern to the believer. The one who's been born again. Who has a new nature. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old is gone. The new has come. And part of the new that comes is a new attitude towards sin. He used to be just fine with it. Now he wants to not sin against God.

It's the difference between the nature of a sow and the nature of a cat. And you'll give me some liberties for the sake of illustration. But if a sow finds herself in a big hole full of mud, it lays down in it, doesn't it?

[5:11] And it says, ah, this is just the life for me. It's in its element. That's its home. That's where it belongs. She has a nature that likes that cool mud.

But let a cat just step one paw into that mud. And it'll spend the next hour licking itself clean. It's a different nature from the sow.

And that's a picture of the different nature between us as we're born into this world with the nature of the sow. Sin is our element. We've turned our back on God and we've gone after our sin. But when we're born again, we have a change of nature, a change of heart. And now we want to be clean from sin.

The believer's new nature is being renewed in the image of its creator. Becoming more and more like Jesus. And so holiness is our element, not sin.

[6:14] In fact, it's now one of our greatest griefs in life that we sin against God. The God we love. The God who made us for himself.

The God who sent his son to suffer and die in our place. Yes, it grieves us that we would ever sin against him.

In fact, is it not one of the greatest anticipations we have for heaven? Is that we will never again sin against the one we love. So there's a change of nature towards sin.

And so in our passage, we see that sin's a big deal to David. He has a new nature. He wants to not sin against God. He wants to keep his way pure from sin.

So young people, anyone under 15? Or under 25? Or 45? You're younger than me.

[7:13] Young people, God has a question for you to answer. And the question is this. How can a young man keep his way pure?

How can he do this? The fact that the question is asked infers that it's no easy task. How can you, young people, keep yourself pure in such an impure environment?

Think of it this way. I think it would make a great game for you young people. There's a big field, and it's all marked out with boundaries. And all of you are lined up behind this line.

And you're all wearing white pants and white shirts. And the aim is to get to the other side of the field and pass this line without soiling your white clothes.

But in the field have been placed lots of people with buckets of mud. And they can't move, but they can throw mud at you as you go by.

[8:24] Well, that's kind of like the way it is, young people, in life. How are you living in this world, passing through this life, going to keep yourself pure, ethically clean, morally pure?

What makes it no easy task is your threefold enemy of the trinity of evil, the flesh, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

There's a devil and his hellish crew. All the angels that fell with him. These are supernatural beings. And their goal is to dirty your life with sin and to drag you into hell.

They've been at this work since the Garden of Eden. They're experts at finding your weakness. On earth is not their equal. And they're throwing their evil slime your way. Then there's the enemy of the world. It, too, is out to squeeze you into its mold.

[9:31] 1 John 5, 19, we know that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. The Father has given him that leash to be the one that's ruling over this present evil world.

And the world system, you see, is just spewing out the devil's lies. His temptation, his filth, the filthy music, the filthy movies, the filthy novels, the filthy pornography, the devilish doctrines, the attacks on biblical morality, denying the very category of sin, or that there is any objective standard of what's right and wrong, pumping you up with pride and self-esteem.

That's the world. And it's throwing its slime your way. And then, perhaps worst of all, there's your own flesh. Your own flesh.

That powerful principle of sin within. The traitor on the inside of the castle of your heart that is attracted to what the devil and the world is throwing your way.

Inward sinful desires that war against your soul, 1 Peter 2, 12. And with all this against you, young person, how are you ever going to keep your way pure?

[10:52] That's the question. But now, why is this question addressed specifically to you young people?

Because God wants the best years of your life. He made you for himself. He says, remember your creator in the days of your youth.

That's now. While you're young, serve him. Not when you're grown up. Not when you get to high school.

Not when you graduate. Not when you get a job. Not when you get married. Now, remember him. In the days of your youth. That's what he wants. And he also deserves the best years of your life.

He made you for himself to serve him. Why should the devil get your best years? And God only get the leftovers after sin has made a wreck of you. No, he deserves the best years of your life.

[11:53] He deserves the glory of young people faithfully serving him with the strength of their youth. To glorify him. As being a pure young lady.

A pure young man. In the midst. Of an impure youth culture. Marching to the beat of a different drummer. Swimming upstream. Willing to stand alone if need be.

For the Lord and his word. It's the wonder of a good apple. In the barrel of a bunch of bad apples. Oh, how God is glorified.

When young people. Are walking according to his command. Living a pure life. In a morally decadent. Young generation.

So how? How can you do this? And let me just say before we do that. The answer is no different for us who are older. The answer is the same.

[12:52] Though it's addressed especially to the younger. But I cannot keep my way pure. Unless I do this. And heed the answer. So four points from our text.

How to keep your way pure. First of all, the right manual. Notice it says, How can a man, young man, keep his way pure? By living according to your word. Some translations.

By taking heed. According to your word. By guarding your life. According to your word. It's all according to your word. So, the Bible is God's word.

What the Bible says, God says. And it gives us understanding about the most important things in life. It defines reality. Life as it really is.

It peels off all the layers of lies that the devil has been spreading. And the world has been promoting. And it tells us the way it really is.

[13:51] And so here we have a right view of God. Not God as I like to think of him. But God as God knows himself to be. Revealed to us.

Here we have a right view of self. Who are you? This book will tell you. Be prepared for the truth. Prepare to have yourself laid bare before the eyes of him to whom you must give an account.

But here we have the right view of sin. It's not just a little mistake. It's rebellion against God. Here we have the right view of Jesus Christ.

And the only way of salvation in him. Here we see what hell is like. What heaven is like. And every other thing about life. Everything needful for life and godliness.

Keeping yourself pure. It's all here. It's all here. What a blessing is this book. And the Bible shows a clear connection between God's word and a pure life.

[14:58] Those things are connected. In a cause-effect relationship. You keep your way pure from sin by living according to God's word.

So here you see the path of holiness marked out by God's commands and precepts. And by comparing God's ways with your ways, you see where you've not measured up.

And so David says, I have considered my ways. I've considered them in light of your ways. And have turned my steps toward your statutes.

That's verse 59. That's how I keep my way pure. It's in this book that I see how I'm supposed to live. And considering it. And considering my ways.

I must turn my steps to your way. So I keep repenting. That's the way we keep our lives pure. We keep repenting. We keep realigning our lives with God's word.

[16:00] I order my steps in your word. So Ephesians 5, 25 to 27. Husbands, love your wives. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy.

Cleansing her by the washing with water through the word. Oh. The cleansing. The keeping ourselves pure comes by the washing of the word.

This is for those who are savingly joined by faith in Jesus Christ to him and are his bride. We're his people. We are his wife.

The church. And so Jesus says, I wash you. I cleanse you with the washing of the word. Did you know Jesus is doing that today?

Right here, right now. He's washing us with his word. He says in John 15, 3 to his disciples, Now you are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you.

[17:08] He prays to his father in John 17, 17. Father, sanctify them by the word, by your truth. Your word is truth. There's a sanctifying, cleansing effect in the word of God.

It's the instrument God uses to keep our way pure, to help us not sin against him. 1 Thessalonians 2, 13. God's word is at work in you who believe.

It's not just a dead letter to you. No, to you who believe. It's at work. It's doing something to you. Indeed, it's penetrating.

It's living and active. It's sharper than a double-edged sword. And it's searching, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. It's illuminating. It's uncovering.

It's exposing. It's rebuking, correcting, leading, purifying. 1 Peter 1, 22. You have purified yourselves by obeying the truth.

[18:11] So it's here that you find great and precious promises, too. So that by them you may participate in the divine nature. A new nature.

Being conformed to God's nature. And thereby escape from the corruption, the crud that is in this world through evil desires. It's through the word that we keep our way pure.

And so 1 John 2, 14. The word of God lives in you and you have overcome the evil one. So the evil one keeps tempting, keeps alluring, keeps coming at you.

But you overcome him. Because the word lives in you. Because the word lives in you. That's how you keep your way pure in an impure world with a tempting devil.

So the Iranians have put mines in the Strait of Hormuz. So they're going to keep ships from passing through it without their permission.

[19:16] But there is a safe pathway to get through where the mines have been swept clean. But you need to stay on that pathway. In the same way, there's a safe path through this dangerous world.

God's word is the map. It's the chart and the compass pointing the way through this world to lead you safely home. God's word is the map. His word is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path.

And in it, we hear him saying, this is the way. Walk in it. He warns us of evil ways and their consequences. That we might keep our feet from every evil path.

Verses 101. So it's here that we meet our Savior. And we see how he lived as the perfect man. And we hear him say, follow me.

Follow me in the path of holiness. Young person, are you making good use of the right manual?

Getting into it each day. You see, the sum of this first point can be wrapped up in what D.L. Moody said.

[20:29] This book will keep you from sin. Or sin will keep you from this book. So that's why David is so happy and praises God for this book.

Because it keeps him from sin. It's the right manual. Secondly, you need wholehearted seeking.

Verse 10. I seek you with all my heart.

Do not let me stray from your commands. I seek you with all my heart. All true religion is heart religion. It's more than just outward behavior.

Going to all the right places at the right time with the right people doing the right thing. No, no. It's about heart religion. What are you doing right now with your heart before the living God? Heart religion.

I seek you with all my heart. You know, one of the greatest complaints God has about a lot of religious people. In the Old Testament and the New Testament. It was true of Isaiah's day.

[21:31] These people draw near to me with their mouth. And they honor me with their lips. But something is far from me. Their heart is far from me.

Jesus can say to his own generation. Isaiah, what he spoke is true of you. You draw near to God with your mouth. You honor him with your lips.

How many people today are in places of worship honoring him with their mouth and their lips. But God who looks on the heart says, it's far from me.

And he's not impressed at all. When they come to church to throw God a bone and then live the rest of the week for themselves. They're not honestly seeking to live according to God's word.

They're not seeking God with all their hearts. Read Isaiah 1, Matthew 23. And see just what God thinks about these.

[22:28] Who are not honestly seeking God with their hearts. He hates their evil assemblies. Their worship. As they give lip service to God.

And then live for themselves. He loves sincerity. He loves heart. In worship. He hates hypocrisy. So if you're going to seek God, it must be with all your heart.

David's not half-hearted. You notice that here in verse 10. He's not half-hearted about living according to God's word. I seek you with all my heart.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. That's what God demands. And that's what David brings, you see. As he seeks God for purity. And that's the prayer of the upright that pleases God.

When we come with all of our heart. God says to a strange people in Jeremiah 29, 13. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

[23 : 31] You can count on it. But you must seek him with your heart.

You must mean what you say. As you seek him. You must say what you mean. No playing games with God. Are you sincere in seeking God's help to live a holy life? According to his commandments.

Not just putting these words into your prayer. Because it's the right thing to say in a prayer. Just because of some habit you've got in. But because you're truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

You want a holiness, a purity of life. That far surpasses those phony Pharisees. As Jesus points out. It must be sincere surrender.

Of your way. For his way. That seems to be the thing the Iranians won't do. They won't surrender. Oh, let's talk. Let's give lip service. But there's no running up with a white flag.

[24 : 28] We're laying down our arms. Full surrender. Unconditioned. No, we want this condition. Are you doing that with God? He won't play games. You must seek me with all your heart.

Not just a fraction of your heart. But all your heart. Not just this and this area of your life. But I'm going to hang on to this for me. No, no.

No games with him. It's all or nothing with him. He said, if you want to be my disciple, what's the first thing? Deny yourself. Not just a few things.

Deny your whole self. Your whole way is wrong. And take up your cross and follow me. It's not 90% surrender.

And holding out on 10% for you. Because you know what that's doing? That's giving the devil 10%. And he'll know where to find you.

[25 : 27] In that 10%. And you'll find that any sin that you cherish in your heart and hold on to may very well be the thing that in the end undoes you.

No, I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. Just one leak allowed can sink a ship.

No matter how many other leaks you plug. And one sin allowed leaves you most vulnerable to the enemy. And he knows where to find you. Unconditional surrender.

All my heart. All my life. Come and renew my mind. Come and reorder my disordered affections. Come and subdue my rebel will. It's no longer mine.

It's yours. This is the way to keep your heart pure in an impure world. Wholehearted seeking. And then thirdly, desperate prayer.

[26 : 27] Desperate praying. It's there in verse 10 as well. I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. There's this prayer. David sincerely wants to obey.

But he knows he doesn't have it in himself to obey. He sees the path of purity laid out before him in God's commands. And at once, he feels his need for God's help to help him live according to that word.

He knows he's weak as water. And so we now find him crying for help. I seek you with all my heart. Don't let me stray from your commands.

Do you hear his desperation in that cry? He feels this world's allurements. He feels the pull, the tug upon him. Pull to wonder from the path.

Just a step outside of this command or that command. And his spirit is willing, but his flesh is weak. And he feels it. And he fears it.

[27 : 40] The hymn writer put it this way. Prone to wonder. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. God, here's my heart.

Whole heart. Here's my heart. You take and seal it for your courts above. Desperate prayer. That's the language of dependence on God.

How can you know you're depending on God and not on yourself? You pray with a desperation. So are you just saying your prayers or do you really pray? God, I'm so weak that if you don't hold me

up, I'll fall.

The world, the flesh, and the devil are so strong that if you don't hold the reins on me, I will stray. So don't let me stray from your command.

I need thee every hour. We love to sing it, but it's not just a song to be sung at church a couple times a year.

[28:39] It's a cry to God we ought to be making often. I need thee. Oh, I need thee. Every hour, I need thee.

Oh, bless me now. Now, my Savior, I come to thee. We all know people who have gone astray. They once were very eager in the things of God, but now they're far from him. How did they get so far from God? Straying happens one little step at a time.

That's the way straying works. It's not a fall off a cliff. A straying is the sheep taking one step away from the shepherd, and then another, and then another.

And the steps are often so small and insignificant that they're not even aware that there's straying. A cooling heart with a declining enjoyment of God in private prayer and in the reading of his word is where it often starts.

[29:57] The outer forms may be kept up, but little real dealings with the living God and my soul. And then those times of God are skipped occasionally and soon become rarer and rarer as they just busy themselves with other things.

Not necessarily really bad things, but just other things. Things other than communion with God. Hearing him speak in his word and responding in prayer.

And then they start cutting corners on God's commands. Just a little bit. And then the meetings of the church are neglected.

And slowly but surely, the cooling heart becomes the hardened heart. And they find themselves far from God. They've strayed from God and his commandments.

And breaking God's commandments is now the new norm for them. And it comes easy. And then they find the chains of sin have wrapped around them and are harder to break than they ever thought.

[31:08] That's why the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 2 and verse 1, We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we've heard. Why?

Why? So we do not drift away. What do you have to do to drift away? You're in a boat on the shore. You don't have an anchor out. You take a nap. And when you wake up, you find yourself far from the shoreline. You don't have to do anything to drift.

You rather need to do lots of things not to drift. To come to this word. To have it search your heart. To cry out in desperation, don't let me drift.

Don't let me stray from your commands. With all your heart. Anybody here been straying from the Lord?

[32:11] Return to me is his constant invitation. Return to me. Not just to a set of commands. You stepped away from me when you stepped away from my commands.

Return to me. However long you've been straying. However far you've drifted. The Lord calls you today. Return to me and I will cure you of your backsliding.

Jeremiah 3.22 I will heal your waywardness and love you freely, graciously. Hosea 14.4 So today if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart.

Rather, acknowledge your sin. Seek God's mercy in Jesus Christ. He died for sheep that love to wander. Go to him.

Confess your sin. Say, Jesus, I come. Heal me of my waywardness. And make me to run in the path of your commands. For there I find true delight.

[33:14] And you'll find he's more full of grace than you are of sin. And you'll find his promise is true. That if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just. To forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us.

To purify us. From all unrighteousness. Believer, when's the last time you prayed? Don't let me stray from your command. I really think it's the Old Testament companion of the Lord's prayer. As he taught us to pray. Lead me not into temptation. But deliver me from the evil one. I'm not strong enough, Lord.

I'm not safe in temptation. Don't lead me into temptation. But deliver me. Don't let me stray. Well, we keep our way pure by taking heed to God's word.

Wholeheartedly praying for his help. The right manual. Wholehearted seeking. Desperate praying. And lastly, the aim pursued.

[34 : 21] The aim pursued. Verse 11. I have hidden your word in my heart. That I might not sin against you. Now, we're going to have to wait until next week, Lord willing, to deal with the hiding of God's word in our hearts.

David had internalized God's word. We need to get this in there. And that's what David had done. We'll unpack that next week.

But for now, I want you to notice, why did David do that? Why did he hide God's word in his heart? Why wholehearted seeking of God?

Why desperate praying to God? Why internalizing God's word? Memorizing, meditating on it day and night. What's the purpose? That I might not sin against you.

Do you hear the heartbeat of this man in that statement? That I might not sin against you. Is that your aim?

[35 : 24] Are you pursuing it? I think something unhealthy has crept into Western Christianity. We know that we cannot be perfect in this life.

We all sin. We can't stop sinning altogether. Our imperfect hearts are inevitably going to leave their mark on everything that we do. And so we have every reason, every day, according to Jesus, to pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

We're experts on the biblical fact that everybody sins. And even after we're Christians, we still sin. And it does taint everything we do. True enough, but we've drawn a wrong conclusion from that. And it goes like this. Since I know I can't be perfect, I know I'm going to sin. And why should I make it my goal, my aim, not to sin?

I'm just setting myself up for discouragement, disappointment. When I do sin. Let me give you three reasons why you should make it your aim. Very quickly, number one, because God tells us to.

[36 : 34] Jesus said, be perfect as my Father in heaven is perfect. Yes, he knows that our performance will be less than our aim. But he still says that's the aim. We don't change the standard of holiness just because you fell and made yourself unable to keep God's commands perfectly.

It's still there. John says, 1 John 2, 1. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. He just said if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Yet he turns around and says, I write this to you so that you will not sin. That's one of the purposes of the word of God. It is written so that you might not sin.

That's why David hid God's word in his heart. That he might not sin against him. It was his aim. This book will keep you from sin.

But our age has made sin the normal. Even for the Christian. We've grown accustomed to it. Complacent towards sin. We all sin. It's just inevitable.

[37 : 44] We don't try very much not to sin. We just accept the fact we are going to sin all the way to heaven. So we get used to it. We have low expectations of holiness, of others, of ourselves. Little efforts at mortifying sin.

Putting it to death. Progressing in holiness. God says, this is the aim of scripture that you might not sin. Make it your aim. Secondly, why should we make it our aim when we can't reach it?

Because those who make it their aim to not sin get closer to it than those who don't. So you've got a gun. And a hundred yards away, I've put a target. And I say, I'm going to give you two shots.

The first shot, I want you to aim at the bullseye. Oh, I couldn't hit that from here, John. That's all right. Just aim for it. And you shoot. You're three feet off of it.

There it is. And then I say, okay, now take a shot and don't aim for the bullseye. Now, which bullet is closer to the bullseye? He who aims at nothing hits it every time.

[38 : 48] And if we don't aim at holiness, we will go far, much farther drifting from God than if holiness and not sinning is our aim, even though we should sin.

We don't aim lower, even though our achievement is lower. And then thirdly, as far as disappointment when we fail, I should hope that we are disappointed when we sin against God.

When we sin against the one who died for us, the one we love, I say it's a healthy thing to be disappointed in yourself for sinning against this wonderful, gracious, kind, good shepherd.

Oh, that we would be more disappointed than we are by our sin. That we would be humbled and grieved, even as the Beatitudes pronounce blessing to the one who's poor in spirit, who mourns for sin.

It's the self-esteem crowd that don't want to be disappointed when they sin. It might injure my self-confidence. And I say all the better.

[40:06] Then we might shift our confidence onto God and pray with more heart, don't let me stray from your commands. Then we might just, if we get disappointed enough in ourselves, we might just start hating sin more.

And trying to kill it more and diligently hiding God's word in our heart more. There's three reasons to make not sinning your aim.

As John writes, my dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. And his very next words are, but if anyone does sin.

You see, he's a realist. You still have your aim to not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father. Jesus Christ, the righteous one, the only righteous one.

And he pleads with the Father on our account. And what does he plead? Oh God, it wasn't that bad. Father, he really meant better. No, no, no.

[41:14] He doesn't plead our innocence. In that sense. He says, it was sin, Father, but I bore that punishment at Calvary. Forgive him, Lord.

Forgive, he cries, nor let that ransomed sinner die. I bought him. He's ours. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling.

And to present you, you believer, before his glorious presence. Without fault and with great joy. To the only God our Savior be glory and majesty, power and authority.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Before all ages, now and forever and ever. Amen.