

Keeping a Clean Heart in a Polluted World

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Well, if you have your Bibles this evening, I want to invite you to open with me to the word of God. Psalm 119 verse 9. Psalm 119 verse 9 and we're going through verse 16 this evening.

Tonight we're going to be stepping into the second stanza of this psalm. We're going through the Hebrew alphabet and now we're on the Beth stanza, the Beth stanza which is verses 9-16 and when you look at the structure of the text it bears a distinct mark which you will see a spiritual patriarch the depth and maturity and breadth is commonly what a patriarch would experience so it's pointing to an older man that is speaking as a spiritual father writing and ministering to, as it were, a next generation and focusing on how to trust and obey God's word.

And let's be honest, if you just look out in the world, it is a slippery and often consuming world, ever consuming world. And our enemy is constantly scheming to trip us up, which sin can be incredibly confusing, messy, and ultimately deadly. And every single one of us, regardless of age, in this room, is prone to stumble. And the culture around our community here, specifically in Los Angeles, places immense external pressure on us to compromise in our character.

So how do we stand firm? What does the word of God instruct us in how to stand firm? The psalmist gives us a clear road map. He shows us that God's word purifies the one that's sincere, purifies the one that will be submissive and it purifies the one that will be steadfast.

So, let's walk through these eight verses together as we learn how one aligns their lives, your lives with the word of God. Turn with me then to verse 9. And if you will, at a respect of God's word, stand with me and read along silently as I read from verse 9.

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee. Oh, let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all

riches. I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes. I will not forget thy word. May God bless the reading of this word. You may be seated.

Let's look at verse nine together. And I want you to particularly focus on the question, wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? That is the way that the psalm opens up with a diagnostic question. This is a diagnostic question that ultimately assumes that the natural man is completely depraved. Completely depraved. Totally depraved. Dead in sin. Not a half asleep. No. Dead in sin. It assumes that we do not naturally drift toward purity or holiness. No, we drift toward uncleanness by our nature, by our flesh. But notice the hope embedded in this very question. Purity is possible. Purity is possible. It's not a hopeless question because you will see the statement right after the question. It's not bound by guilt or okay, well, you're just going to have to go on living the way you are. No, it explains how one is to cleanse his way, how it's to be done. The psalmist gives a direct line, not a long complicated list. No, he doesn't just say change your environment, right? That's what the world says. Just change your environment. No, scripture goes straight to the root. It goes to the root. Yes, the Bible does explain to not associate yourselves with fools. But you see where the psalmist is going is past all of that. Where is the root problem? Or rather, where's the root solution to our problem? You see, you cleanse your way by guarding it, taking heed to it. Look at with me according to thy word. That's the answer. That's the solution. The word of God is never to be a restrictive rule book where we follow a bunch of rules. It's not a complicating list that we follow. We simply take heed to his word. It's God's way of cleansing you and me and guiding you and me into a flourishing life.

James Montgomery Boice once wrote, "Remember that the Bible is God's cleansing agent for sin and that without it, you will never live a holy life." Meaning, without the word of God, you cannot live a holy life. Think of the word of God like water. In fact, in Ephesians 5:26 explains it this way. Washing of water by the word. If you walk through with the imagine with me a dusty or muddy field, your clothes and skin inevitably gathers dirt or mud. There's no way avoiding it. You don't sit around hoping the dirt will just disappear or the mud will disappear on its own. No. What do you have to apply? Water. Water to cleanse that mud or that dirt off your clothes. In the same application as we see in Ephesians 5:26, the word of God is our daily spiritual bath that washes away the filth, the grime of the world's thinking. Yes, the world wants you to think a certain way that is contrary to God's word. And how often are you letting the spiritual cleansing of the word wash over your mind? That is the word take heed. If you'll notice before according to thy word this word heed means consistent observance of guarding your heart and your mind of guarding your heart and your mind. Observation another way of putting it in this translation in the original language is being like a watchman. A watchman is to protect or fortify the walls from the enemy from coming in. Same way, same idea. Take heed. Don't

let the enemy come in to your mind and to your heart. And we are to observe and guard by the word according to the word of God.

So then naturally, if you look at verse 10, follow along with me. It says, "With my whole heart have I sought thee. Oh, let me not wander from thy commandments." See, the heart of the matter is always the matter of the heart. Notice carefully what the psalmist is seeking here. He does not say, "With my whole heart, have I sought scripture." He says, "Have I sought thee?" Thee. You often see this with the psalmist. I want to seek thee. Again, going all the way to the root. Learning the Bible is not an intellectual end in itself. It is the prescribed means to a greater end. We study the word of God because we are seeking the God of the word. Amen.

If you're not seeking God himself, your Bible study, if you have one, will actually become counterproductive and can be very dangerous in leading into legalism. That's just a bunch of principles to follow, but not actually getting to God. That is the goal is a relationship with the Lord. I mentioned that this morning as well about when we pray, we are to acknowledge him. Yes. We are to have our prayer request, but are you wanting to be filled by his spirit? And as well in that context, are you wanting to be filled with his word with knowing and knowing him personally as you're reading his word? That's what the psalmist is saying here. I want to seek thee through your word.

And then if you notice in the text, he goes on with a very sense of humility here. Even though he seeks God wholeheartedly, he cries out with this, "Oh, let me not wander. Oh, let me not wander. Oh, let me not wander." How often do we get that close and intimate with God the Father in our prayers that we don't even trust our own heart that he must be the one that helps us not to wander off and our own ideas and our own thoughts but just being consecrated with his word. And so this is a confession of the psalmist saying, "I am weak in my flesh. I am weak in my mind. I am weak in my heart. I am weak just entirely." And he says, "Oh, let me not wander. Oh, let me not wander." That is the weakness of man. We drift naturally without God's help keeping us on the right path. You see, sincerity is not enough to keep you on the right track. Meaning you want to have the right intention. You want to have the right heart motivation. Ultimately you need God's help to keep you on the right path. You cannot keep yourself on the right path. You must depend upon him wholly. See left to our own devices. Our hearts again is prone to drift. Psalmist acknowledges this. Do you often acknowledge that in your prayer life? Or you think your spiritual life is all good. You have all these experiences in the past. No, every day is an opportunity to drift every day. Every day. And this is what we need constantly is the Lord's strength to remain steadfast.

You see, we can only stay steadfast with the Lord's strength. Picture a child with me. A child that would refuse eating the solid food in order for his or her good. Every time you

turn away and depend upon yourself, you're acknowledging that somehow you can grow on your own. Somehow you can follow God on your own strength, but in and of itself, it will leave you wandering off. And so we have to constantly acknowledge, Lord, you're the one that sustains me. You are the one that can hold me fast. And so if you truly look to him that way, there's a little thing inside of us that says, "We're good enough now. We don't need God." No. Every time we need God every time we read this book. And we must not depend upon our intellect, not depend on how much we've studied the word of God, not depend upon experiences in life. No, none of that we can hold on to. We must hold on to God himself.

Another way of putting it, are you seeking God with a divided heart or are you doing it with a whole heart? Think about this. Think of entering marriage part-time. That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? I'll be part-time with you and part-time I'll be with the world. No. When you go into marriage, you commit your whole heart to that person, don't you? It's the same way with the Lord. We commit our whole heart to him. We do not ever go with a divided heart. And how does he say it? He says it according to God's word is your whole heart. According to his word is by doing it with your whole heart. You depend upon him to speak to you with his word. And so whenever you open up your Bible, pray in that opening, remind yourself as you open his word because he's saying for you to follow the instruction. Lord, let me not wander. Let me not wander away from your commandments. Protect me from the devil's schemes and my own weak flesh.

That is always the case, isn't it? The devil never says, "Oh, I'll stop attacking him or her that's a believer or oh, okay, he's strong now." No. You see how nuanced the life of the psalmist is and how he instructs us as you open the Bible and take his word seriously.

Now we're going to go into a very familiar verse Psalm 119:11 from childhood on up have memorized this verse which reads thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee. You see when it says hid it does not mean we are to be secret about it who conceals our faith from the world. No, Matthew 5:16 tells us explicitly let our light shine before men. So that is not what it's saying here. Rather to hide the word means to store it up. Store it up. And to store it up in the sense that it is the most valuable thing in your life. We're going to see this in the preceding verses, but that when you store up, you're storing up treasure. You're storing up treasure, priceless treasure. And the area that the psalmist says to secure it is in your heart. Not in your mind, but in your heart. That's where the word of God must be hid in. See, the word of God is the best place and the best book rather to place into one's heart. No one's word should be placed into our heart. This is acknowledging the psalmist. No, I hear words everywhere. I want God's word to be the one that is hidden in my heart.

When the word of God shapes your innermost being, which is where the heart is, and it's not referring to this beating heart, but the command center of your life, that's what it's primarily speaking about. It means to fortify against temptations and make your soul highly sensitive to falsehood because after all, you're hiding truth in your heart and you're allowing the falsehood to be outside of your heart. You won't bring sinless perfection. That's not what the psalmist is saying here on this side of eternity, but it will cause you to sin less. That is true according to his word. Amen.

Think of storing up the word like keeping a deep reservoir of water. And oftentimes we can experience this in California in those dry summer months, right? And you have this reserve. And when the drought hits, you don't panic. You don't panic because your reservoir is full of God's truth. You only panic when falsehood is stored up in your heart. But if you're truly storing up God's word, you'll never panic. When the dry spells come, when temptation attacks, or when the enemy fires his flaming darts at your mind constantly, you can instantly pull from that hidden reserve within your heart and answer a definitive, "It is written. It is written." just as Jesus did in the wilderness experience in the desert. That's how God wants us to hide his word in our hearts that we may not sin against him. You see, if sin is present in your life, it will drive you away from the word of God. But if the word of God is treasured in your heart, it will drive sin out of your life.

So as you move beyond merely reading the text with your senses, with your eyes, even memorizing it, it must go to the level of meditation where you're thinking about it day and night where you're letting it sink deep into your innermost being so that you have a defense mechanism in your life. The greatest defense is the word of God against the enemy, against your flesh and the world. So when temptation strikes, the psalmist recognizes the only thing that will fight off these enemies is the word of God that is hid in one's heart. And then when he acknowledges this truth, he goes into this statement in verse 12. Blessed art thou, oh Lord. Teach me thy statutes.

Here the psalmist shifts seamlessly into worship. As he's reading, as he's meditating on God's word, he is now in the presence of God and he's worshiping God. And he acknowledges blessing the Lord, to be grateful, to be reverent, to give praise where praise deserves in his presence. In most psalms, the statement of praise is followed by a reason. For example, praise the Lord for he is good. But here, the praise is followed by a request. Teach me thy statutes. Teach me thy statutes. You see, true worship and a teachable spirit always walks hand in hand. True worship and a teachable spirit always walks hand in hand. You cannot truly ascribe worth to God if you don't know and understand him. So when you pray teach me, we are essentially acknowledging humility before God. I need you, Lord, to teach me. I need you, the work of the Holy Spirit, to interpret this correctly for me before going to man's opinions, but going to God and wanting the Holy Spirit to

be the interpreter of his word. And that is what this humility of the psalmist is going to hear in the text.

You see, we don't naturally possess wisdom in itself. And that's why we need to constantly ask God, the very master builder, the one that has written his word, and for us to be molded in, we are to go to him. Amen. So, the Bible is entirely unique from every other book in human history. Think about it. It is the only book in the world where every single time, every single time you open it, the author is present with you. What other book does that where God is present with you? J.I. Packer said it this way. God the Father is the giver of scripture. God the Son is the theme throughout scripture. And God the Spirit is the author and interpreter of scripture. You see, we are recognizing the triune God when we truly open up the word of God as he intended as the psalmist instructs us. Do you approach the word of God in this way? Or do you come in this way humble sitting at the feet of Jesus as it were before you began your devotion before positioning your heart you acknowledge his greatness and you invite the Holy Spirit you invoke the Holy Spirit to instruct you of his word every day this can be your prayer.

And so he goes from praise and worship now into verse 13 and he says this with my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. Now we going from time of devotion into the inner life and now an overflow an outward testimony is what we see here in verse 13. Notice the two beautiful possessive pronouns in this verse. My lips and thy mouth. My lips and thy mouth. What the psalmist is saying here is, I will not allow anything to come out of my lips that does not align with what has come out of your mouth. Isn't that beautiful? We want to be aligned to what comes out of God's mouth, his word. Alignment is important to God here as we see in the text. Furthermore, look at the scope of his proclamation. He declares all the judgments. He didn't pick and choose the convenient parts and leave out the ones that were hard. No, he proclaimed what the Apostle Paul called the whole counsel of God. I want to acknowledge all of you, Lord, all of your judgments. Faith is that kind of communion with God. Not private interpretation and picking and choosing. With the heart that is full, the mouth will naturally overflow. What comes out of the heart.

And so as your pastor, I will tell you directly at this stage, one of the greatest things that's sanctifying in my own life is that I have this burden that as I stand up here in the pulpit preaching the word to you, I am of one paradigm and of a bundle of paradoxes. What I mean by that is that it's only because of God's grace that I'm here to preach because I know my own weaknesses and if I am to constantly acknowledge my weaknesses and just share before you my what my going on my heart I can very easily forget to give you what is in the word of God that the very word of God is preaching to my heart as it's preaching to your heart as once said one preacher said as one finger is pointing to you three fingers are pointing right back at me and I need grace just as much as you do. And I just want to

acknowledge that as your pastor, I need just as much grace as you do. I need just as much mercy as you do. And I'm not here to ever boast that I'm in a higher spiritual plane. No, when I read this, I'm reading it as if I am reading it with you along. I need his daily provision in my life. And so I know this myself so I can share this with you and saying this is how you can be sustained by God's grace. Amen.

The burden compels me to stay in the text to stay in the text. It compels me to pray over the text. It compels me to pursue my own personal holiness as you are pursuing your own personal holiness. And when you do that, when I do that, you go into your homes, your own workplaces, your neighborhoods, and you're able to declare God's truth. You're able to stay in the text. You're able to pray over yourself and you are able to compel others to know Jesus Christ as their own savior and lord because without him we can do nothing. He said that to us and that means all the days of our lives and it's getting more tempting as you get closer doesn't it?

So the outward proclamation results in first the inward transformation and he goes off with saying let your lips declare what his mouth has spoken. And then we transition into verse 14 and now he says I have rejoiced. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies as much as in all riches. The psalmist hits us right as it were in our wallets. He compares the pure joy of knowing and walking in God's truth to as if you were holding a vast amount of wealth. He is bringing the tangible into understanding the spiritual. This runs entirely counter to the ambitions of our world. Wealth is priority to the world. No, to the believer in Christ, the word of God is your treasure. It is your ultimate treasure that you hold on to. The words of God is a treasure and you're constantly accumulating your soul of wealth of treasure of God's word instead of the status and the fame and the temporal wealth of this world as your priority.

The word of God plainly tells us that knowing, believing, and obeying God's word makes you truly rich. Makes you truly rich in God. Earthly prosperity is temporary. We know that. We know it's limited. We know that can never satisfy the deepest parts of our hearts and ultimately our souls. So God's testimonies, God's testimonies, thy testimonies, as it says here, the psalmist, carries an eternal weight of value for your soul. How many of us are living in a spiritual poverty state? Foolishly treating the Bible like something that is neglected and not treasured, not daily observed, but instead is overwhelmed by the things of this world and its riches when God has promised all along that the only way that your soul is going to be treasured is having him in your life and his word. Having God's word is better than 10,000 gold pieces of silver, or of any wealth in this world. When we prioritize eternal truth over the temporal material gain, what happens to our finances and possessions stop being the objects of worship? You see, this is a worship issue. And finally, it becomes when it's rightly aligned, when you truly treasure and find the richness in God, in his word.

We look at verse 15. This is what happens. The outcome of verse 14. I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways. Here he now goes into his solemn vows. He goes into his vows of meditation and concentrating on his word. And biblical meditation is completely different of course from eastern meditation which calls you to empty your mind. No, biblical meditation demands that you fill your mind with its truth. As it says here, meditating in thy precepts is a practice of serious intentional meditating. Meditation of a practical application. We see this in the text. First, to have respect, to have respect, to have reverence over his word. It's another way of saying fixing your eyes away from the world and fixing your eyes to God, paying attention to him. Where you treasure the most, that is whom you consider worthy. Worship. Worthy is your worth. And when you fix your eyes on him and his word and you choose to live according to God's design that allows for your attention to be upon him and less upon this world and by the way the patterns because we see he explains thy ways. This is a matter of saying the pattern of your life. Is it a pattern every day of moving in the direction of what is God's design, God's word, living according to his words and living out of more and more reverence and respect for him? Or is it respecting the things of this world and respecting the treasure of this world?

So he comes to this juncture in verse 15 what he's going to choose his mind to think and dwell upon. Think of meditation like in an agricultural world and we know the Lord Jesus used many illustrations but there's one that I didn't actually know until recently when I actually went to the county fair and we were at a farm where there was cows and the lady said that a cow has one stomach but has four separate compartments. And each compartment does a different task. And I thought about this and how it applies to this verse about meditation and how one's life goes from one degree of progress to another. And in many ways that is how it is, isn't it? You see the process of chewing for the cow happens four times. Let me just share with you what it does in the stomach. Number one is the initial intake. It takes in larger parts of the material that the cow is eating and extracts and stores up one part of the nutrients. So the initial intake is the carrying the load as it were into the compartment and then it stores it up and then it goes to the next chamber and it regurgitates that and it basically allows for deeper of the nutrients to come out of it. So essentially we're going from one progress of storing up another process of regurgitating and deeply taking out the nutrients of the material that the cow has eaten. And then it extracts even more nutrients in the third chamber by turning over the very thing again and taking more out of it. And then lastly it digests the food.

So think of it this way. The initial intake of God's word, you take large passages of scripture like this one, Psalm 119, maybe eight verses like we are doing now this evening and you store it up. You hide it in your heart and then you reflect upon those eight verses by reflecting on it deeply and then how it applies to your life. And then the third process is now extracting the very essence of the passage that you're reading by continuously

turning over the piece of scripture in your mind and your heart to now going from practical application to a deep spiritual nourishment of your life. Growth in your life. Growth in your spiritual life. And the fourth, the transformation. The transformation begins deeply dwelling on God's word and the information that you have now placed in your life over and over again allowing God to transform you from the inward out. Sounds very familiar to the four stages of the parable of the sower, doesn't it? Four stages just like a cow. I just thought about that and it was just four stages, but it's the last one that ultimately bears fruit. It's the last ground that bears fruit.

So, are you giving the word of God your undivided attention? Giving your whole heart and are you constantly not distracted by the world and what the news and social media is constantly churning for you to meditate on when you read scripture it's never to be rushed again think about that four parts maybe didn't get it the first time maybe it didn't get to the second. But the goal is the ground. The seed is the same. The nutrients is the same. But how are you allowing it to be soaked into your life or completely transforms you from the inside out and there is true growth, true spiritual growth in your life that cannot be rushed. Growth cannot be rushed. Ponder over God's word. You can do that in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, different times of the day. There are moments in my life where I would have to literally and here's my weakness. I put a timer on my desktop on my phone to remind myself, okay, in a couple hours I need to go back. I want to go back to the word of God because I'm telling you, you can't trust your mind. And you do whatever it takes. And this is just my personal devotion. This is not preparing a sermon. This is my own personal, my own spiritual growth in my personal walk with the Lord. And you have that burden. And then you can do what the psalmist says in Psalm 119:16. I will delight myself in thy statutes. I will not forget thy word.

The stanza reaches its grand climax at this verse with the double vow. A positive vow to delight and a negative vow to never forget. To delight in God's statutes means you love what he loves. And you consider obedience a wonderful privilege, a beautiful privilege rather than a heavy burden. And when he vows, I will not forget. He is establishing an anchor, a spiritual anchor here. I don't want to forget. Meditation of scripture is a primary defense mechanism that safeguards a believer from drifting away from what truly matters to God. And our minds are continually anchored in his unchanging wisdom. Our lives are marked then by steadfast faithfulness, unshakable peace, and going and living after God's purposes and following after his will. You get to see the difference between staying anchored and not drifting anymore. As you anchor yourself over and over again, you start detecting drifting and how far you're drifting more keenly, more aware, and you know you want to come back and you ask the Lord to help you in it. It's so good to be near the Lord. Amen. We sung that this evening, nearer to thee, oh God.

In Philippians 3, the Apostle Paul tells us that there are certain things in our past we must choose to forget if we are to move forward in Christ. But James 1:25 warns us that we must never be forgetful hearers. If you want to experience lasting life change, you have to remember what God has spoken. And if you honor God and his word and you keep his word and hid in your heart, he will keep you. He will keep you. That is a promise. So it's a choice to fall again and again in love with the Lord. Fall in love with the Lord. That's a relationship. That's a relationship.

And we close tonight. This beautiful stanza helps us to see God's word as a purifying work in our lives, a cleansing, a spiritual cleansing of our lives by guarding our hearts according to his instructions. We saw that God's word purifies us when we are submissive to his word by seeking him first and his word with the whole heart and offering praise in our word of worship and to match our mouths with his lips and then we saw God's word purifies us to keep us steadfast anchored in his statutes and we deep and when we deeply meditate on God's word as I explained there will be growth in your life and you will see changes in your life that you will be able to see God more and more beautiful and more majestic and more wonderful. As a world gets more and more into realism with technology, never forget the real life is to know God in all of his majesty and all of his glory and all of his holiness and all of his glory. I'll repeat that again. Let's be a people like that. Amen. Let's be a people of God that truly glorifies God and exalts Christ. When we do that, God will shape our church the way he wants it. And it will look and we pray that it will be a bride ready for Christ in its purity in its holiness. As other churches drift towards making the bride of Christ ugly and causing stains to the bride of Christ, let us be a church that is holy and beautiful before his eyes. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the clear instructions from the psalmist. Lord, we just don't want to know one part of this passage that all of us, many of us in this room are familiar with. Father, we want to meditate on all of the whole counsel we read tonight. Father, I pray that we would do this not only with this stanza, but all the preceding stanzas that you would help us to meditate more deeply into the spiritual wealth of your word and as we do that we will also get deeply in love in our relationship with you through thy son Jesus Christ. And as a result, we know that you are constantly purify our hearts to not be polluted by this world. That we will be unstained, unspotted, as James puts it, from the world, even though we are to stay in the world. I think of the Lord Jesus Christ that prays for us to protect us from the evil one. And as we continue to evangelize our communities and make disciples of Christ, Lord, I pray that we would see more blessings of you changing hearts and transforming hearts by bringing people to know thy son Jesus Christ as their personal savior and lord and a continual sanctifying work where people will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for all these things in the matchless name of Jesus Christ. Amen.