Heart Health Series:
Grow My Heart (Psalm 119:30-32)

By
Andy Davis

At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Grow My Heart

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Wisconsin Culture

1. I thought I grew up in a little town, until I met someone from rural Wisconsin and learned that a city of twenty thousand people was huge. Growing up in Minnesota, and being a Vikings fan, I had a natural aversion to all things Wisconsin. In fact, I went so far as to tell God I would never marry a Packer fan and I would never live in Wisconsin. I learned to stop telling God what I will or will not do.
2. My first exposure to rural life in Wisconsin came as I started to spend time with Mandi and her family. My attitude started with looking down on all things Wisconsin since it was all tainted by the influence of the Packers. However, the more I spent time in Wisconsin, and I was exposed to the uniqueness of the rural culture, I went through a process of change.
3. Since I was used to a busy lifestyle in which you typically ran from one activity and event to the next, there was something within me that was drawn to and appreciated some elements of rural life. The fact that Mandi's family spent several hours together sitting at a campfire, talking, with no agenda, and nothing to move on to, was appealing. The slower pace of life and the relational closeness that came along with that appealed to something inside me. This was very different from the hectic, fast-paced, and exhausting lifestyle I was used to.
4. Over time, my heart developed a desire and grew in that desire for some of the elements of rural life in Wisconsin that I found important and meaningful. There were several lifestyle characteristics of rural Wisconsin that I observed, experienced, and grew a desire for. In short, the desires of my heart changed over time.

B. The desires and feelings of our hearts can change. One way our hearts change is for specific desires to grow and increase. We can develop new passions and interests. While new desires can form and develop regarding everyday interests, this can also happen in the Christian life. As the Spirit of God works in the life of disciples, their desire and interest in the things of God can and will increase.

C. In Psalm 119:30-32, we will learn the priority of praying for God to grow our heart, our internal desires, for the things of God is a critical component of spiritual growth. God doesn't only cleanse our heart so that it isn't drawn toward that which is bad, He also works in us so that our hearts are drawn to what is good. These are two distinct yet related activities of God.

II. Choose God's Way

A. Our prayer life can be impacted by the influence of God by asking the Holy Spirit to influence us to be spiritually and morally good at our core (Ps. 51:10), to be guided by God's incredible knowledge of us (Ps. 139:23-24), to be given God's perception into the true nature of reality (Ps. 119:73), and to have the internal impulse of our heart to be drawn toward what is wrong broken so it no longer controls us (Ps. 141:4). Now, we'll turn to a fifth prayer that can help us

become a person after God's own heart. This prayer provides a simple outline for how spiritual growth works—a list of specific actions required to experience God working in our lives.

B. A person who is passionate about pursuing the heart of God will pray:

> [30] I have chosen the faithful way; I have placed Your judgments *before me.* (Ps. 119:30)

C. Throughout this portion of Psalm 119, a group of closely connected lines (called a strophe), there is a focus on and emphasis of the writers' pursuit of God through specific actions (Ps. 119:25-32).[1] This grouping of lines is built around the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet.[2] The situation being described is of a person who has come to the end of themselves and is laying face down on the ground, exhausted with nothing left, and is now turning to God for spiritual strength and rejuvenation (Ps. 119:25). It is in this desperation that the specific requests of verses 30-32 are found.

D. This emphasis can be seen in the multiple "I" statements. The first of these statements begins the main spiritual lesson of this portion of Psalm 119 ("I have chosen the faithful way", v. 30). A conscious and intentional decision has been made about the direction and course this person's life is going to take. Despite the difficult situation, the writer of this Psalm is committed and determined to stay faithful to God. This is not a decision based on an emotional whim or temporary impulse; it is a careful well thought out choice.[3]

E. The writer of Psalm 119 thinks it is appropriate to act in a certain way.[4] They have adopted a behavioral standard and course of action for their life.[5] This way of acting involves the quality of being faithful to the word of God.[6] God who is faithful, provides a reliable and trustworthy way of life in His word.[7] The connection to the word of God becomes obvious when the explanatory statement is considered with this opening statement ("I have placed Your judgments before me", v. 30). These two statements are connected to the same subject. The faithful way is the same as the word of God. The Psalmist has intentionally made the choice to conform their conduct to the standards of God's word.

F. Placing God's word before him is more than merely looking at the word of God. What naturally follows commitment is conformity.[8] The Psalmist agrees with God that His ways are good and right—the proper way to live (Hos. 14:9). There is a desire to surrender oneself to the word of God and a response of putting it into practice. The modern notion of a mere intellectual knowledge of the word of God is not what is happening here. There is an agreement with the word of God that the message of God is good and is the proper way to live.

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[1] Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15–16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014), 404.
[2] Daleth
[3] George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 125.
[4] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 119:30 "chosen"
[5] Leviticus 18:5
[6] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 119:30 "faithful"
[7] George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 126.
[8] George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 127.

G. Here is how God Himself challenges every person to make this same choice:

> [19] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, [20] by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding close to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, so that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. (Dt. 30:19-20)

H. While God is speaking to the Jews through the writings of Moses, to which the Psalmist reacts, this invitation is open to all (Gen. 17:4, 22:18, 26:4, Dt. 32:43, 1 Kgs. 8:41-43, 2 Chr. 6:32-33, Isa. 56:7, Mk. 11:17).[9] God allows anyone to worship Him no matter the nation they live in or race they are. Every person who has lived will need to decide how they are going to react to God. God invites and encourages people to choose Him through His word by loving Him, listening to Him, and holding Him close (Dt. 30:20). God's word—His instructions and commands—offers spiritual prosperity and life while rejecting God and His word will result in misery and spiritual death. This is the choice given by God.

I. A godly response to this challenge of choice is found in the life of Joshua:

> [15] But if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served, which were beyond the *Euphrates* River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Josh. 24:15)

J. Joshua understood the nature of this choice highlighted by God. It is a personal decision that each person must make for themselves ("choose for yourselves today", v. 15). The responsibility and the consequences are on the shoulders of each individual. No one else can decide for us whether we will accept or reject God through Jesus. Every individual person will stand before God and be accountable to Him for the choice they make. Some people perceive the way of life offered by God as an undesirable choice ("it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord", v. 15). The word of God will either be the basis for our direction and manner of life or He will not. That is our personal choice.

K. Final responsibility for our choice falls on us and no one else. We can't blame our parents for how they raised us. We can't blame our church for not making God interesting enough to us. We can't blame God for not doing enough for us. We can't blame our circumstances for our neglect. Our choice to follow God and His way of life is on us. All of us will stand before God one day and be held accountable for our choice (Rm. 14:10-12). When we stand before God and give an accounting for how we lived our life, we will be standing alone. It will be just us and Jesus (Jn. 5:22). We will be the only person responsible for how we decided to respond to what we knew about God.

L. Every person must make a personal decision to live God's way or reject God and choose their own way. For the person whose heart is set on God, God's way of life is appealing to them. For the person whose heart rejects God, the word of God and living in alignment with it causes

[9] Examples include Rahab, Ruth, and the Queen of Sheba.

displeasure for them.[10] Please make the right choice! May it be said of you that you have chosen the faithful way. Decide to make the word of God the standard for your course of life. Act the way God teaches us to act. This decision is good for you. The more we live the way God teaches us to live in His word the more we will benefit from His wisdom.

III. Cling to God's Word

A. Once a person makes the decision to live for God, they will turn their attention to learning from the word of God:

> [31] I cling to Your testimonies; Lord, do not put me to shame! (Ps. 119:31)

B. The first action taken to pursue God is the decision and determination to follow a course of life that demonstrates faithfulness toward the word of God. The second action is to stay connected to His word over time ("I cling to Your testimonies", v. 31). There is a commitment to stick firmly to the word of God.[11] This commitment to the word of God is strong enough to stay in place even while facing difficult and uncertain outcomes. The writer of Psalm 119 is reading and having consistent contact with the word of God.

C. A person living in pursuit of the heart of God will have the quality of being faithful to God, they will also have the quality of remaining attached to the word of God with a dependent attitude.[12] Like the disciples of Jesus, they realize the word of God is the source of spiritual life and they can't go anywhere else to find what they need (Jn. 6:67-68).

D. There is an attitude of trust in God and His word while participating in Bible engagement ("Lord, do not put me to shame!", v. 31). Contained within this statement is both an attitude of trust and a confidence in God's faithfulness even amid current difficulties. This is a wonderful expression of realism about what life looks like when it is lived in pursuit of God. The Christian life is confident yet filled with disappointments. It is full of trust yet allows for surprises and unexpected turns. It is convinced of God's goodness yet familiar with the pain and heartache of life. It is guaranteed a positive end, yet immediate positive experiences are uncertain.

E. Reading the Bible on a regular basis is one of the greatest predictors of spiritual maturity.[13] This is not surprising consider Jesus' statement that living by every word that comes from God is just as essential and important to life as eating regularly (Mt. 4:4). In a significant study on spiritual formation and maturity, there was a strong correspondence between Bible engagement and demonstrated marks of maturity. Documented in Daniel Im and Thom Rainer's book *No Silver Bullet: Five Small Shifts that will Transform Your Ministry* they cite the LifeWay Research Transformational Discipleship Assessment. The question was asked, "How often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible?". It was observed the more a person reads the Bible on their own, the higher their demonstrated spiritual maturity was. Consistent across the scale was a higher mark of maturity. Those who read the Bible once a month had the lowest marks of maturity. Those who read the Bible a few times a month were lower than those who read once a week.

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[10] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Joshua 24:15 "it is disagreeable"
[11] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 119:31 "I cling"
[12] George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 127.
[13] Daniel Im and Thom S. Rainer, *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2017), 220.

The highest demonstrated marks of spiritual maturity were found in those who read the Bible every day.[14]

F. What is your level of Bible engagement? How often do you personally read and study the word of God for yourself? We are talking about direct contact with the Bible, not hearing what the Bible says second hand from someone else such as a preacher, teacher, parent, devotional, or online video. How often and how much do you have direct personal contact with the word of God for yourself?

G. As we live dependently on the word of God and remain attached to it over time, we do so while trusting God with the results regardless of how our lives turn out. Like the Psalmist, we are confident in God, we hope for the best, but we are also aware the brokenness of life in this world. Obeying God's word and living it out consistently will not always guarantee good and desirable results. Regardless of the consequences, we stay attached to and implement the word of God in our lives.

IV. Carry Out God's Word

A. As the Psalmist stays attached to the word of God, he makes it his goal to respond positively to the word of God:

> [32] I shall run the way of Your commandments, (Ps. 119:32)

B. The Psalmist doesn't just have a knowledge of the word of God with an attitude of dependent attachment, he also desires and acts with an energetic response ("I shall run the way of Your commandments", v. 32). Normally, the imagery of living for God is described as walking. Here the person isn't merely walking, they are running. This image communicates the idea of a wholehearted and passionate response to the word of God. Rather than resistance or hesitation, the Psalmist is passionate about living their life according to the commandments of the word of God. The writer learns something new from the word of God, and he immediately begins the process of implementing it in his life. Jesus also said, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and follow it" (Lk. 11:28). Listening and learning from the word of God is good but the real benefit comes from putting it into practice. Acting on what God says is a wise life foundation (Mt. 7:24).

C. How do you respond to the word of God? Some people hear the word of God communicated or learn from it and they don't like what they hear. They disagree and can respond with anger. Others have contact with the word of God and have their walls up so they respond with resistance. Like trying to lead a dog in a direction they don't want to go all their body weight is leaning and firmly against the Bible. Others respond to God's word in fear. While they are open and potentially willing to put God's word into practice, they are scared to do it and therefore slow to respond.

D. Still other people are cautious when implementing the word of God in their life. When the Bible communicates a truth that they agree with, they will readily act on it. However, there are statements and truths in the word of God that they don't like or are unsure about and they tend to ignore and stay away from them. Another response to the word of God is a person has

[14] Daniel Im and Thom S. Rainer, *No Silver Bullets: Five Small Shifts That Will Transform Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2017), 65.

an internal willingness to act on what they know but they don't always find the ability to do it consistently. Lastly, some people respond to the word of God by wholeheartedly and energetically acting on all that they know from the word of God as best they can. This is the heart and response of the Psalmist.

V. Changing Heart is Promised

A. If disciples are faithful to fulfill the above three requirements, God promises and guarantees a specific outcome:

> [32] For You will enlarge my heart. (Ps. 119:32)

B. Deciding to live God's way, staying attached to the word of God over time with a dependent attitude, and a consistent eager response are all being done with an acknowledgement of a divinely given stamina ("For You will…", v. 32). God is the One who is empowering this whole spiritual growth process. All these spiritual activities are not being accomplished by human effort alone.

C. Faithfulness in action over time leads to increasing desire. Notice how focused the author of this Psalm is about their own responsibility and actions "I have chosen", "I have placed", "I cling to", "I shall run". What does all this activity lead to? God's responsiveness, "For You will…" (v. 32). This faithful pursuer of God engages in all this spiritually activity for the purpose of God responding to how they are living. As the Psalmist participates in the spiritual life, God is going to show up, and God will be working in him throughout the process.

D. So confident is the person who wrote this Psalm that God's reaction to them is viewed as if it is guaranteed ("You will", v. 32). There is no question in their mind that God will fail to do what this person expects God to do. The outcome is guaranteed.[15] The writer knows that God is going to be present and work in Him if his human effort is directed toward the right spiritual activities.

E. God will increase the desire found within this person's heart for the things of God ("For you will enlarge my heart", v. 32). A person's thoughts, desires, priorities, feelings, preferences, and attitudes for God will become larger.[16] In short, God increases our internal capacities for Him as we stay attached and response to His word. Spiritual growth happens when we act faithfully and consistently over time. Action precedes the growth of desire. Desire follows action.[17] The influence and power of God to make larger capacities of heart toward God is what the Psalmist is seeking and praying for. This person wants God to make their heart for God larger. The Psalmist knows that he can't make this happen himself. As much as he wants a larger capacity for the things of God, he knows God is the only One that can produce it in him.

F. What are the spiritual actions that are the main cause of a change of heart and desire? What do we need to do to increase our desire for God? Returning to the same study mentioned earlier,

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[15] George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 115.

[16] Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 119:32 "enlarge"

[17] Although if anyone is a disciple they will have a small desire for the word of God from the Holy Spirit at the very beginning of the Christian life (1 Pet. 2:2)—this desire grows and increases as a person matures spiritually. This initial God given desire may not be enough to motivate consistent contact with the word of God with a positive attitude. It is likely that young disciples will need to force themselves to stay connected to the word of God while their desires learn to catch up.

the simple list includes: 1) Attending a worship service, 2) Attending a small class or group (activities with a strong relational element), 3) Serving God and others, and 4) Bible engagement (as previously mentioned). Those who regularly and consistently participate in these four spiritual activities greatly increase their demonstration of spiritual maturity.[18]

G. This approach to desire is viewed as backwards according to modern thinking. While we generally tend to want to act only in alignment with our feelings and desires, this isn't how spiritual desires are developed. We often want to only act from our feelings and desires, which is why we say things like "I don't feel like it", the Chrisitan life can't be held captive by our desires in the moment. If we only do what we feel like doing, we will fail to grow. Our actions move us toward good desires that will be developed later. If we only act according to our current desires, spiritual growth will be impossible. Many people operate this way and never advance with God as a result. They wait to read their Bible until they desire it. They wait to serve others until they want to do it. They wait to attend church regularly until it makes them happy. Many people fail to understand that our actions inform and educate our desires in the spiritual life. Then as our capacity for the things of God increase, our actions eventually flow from our desires but this takes time.

H. Do you believe God can change your heart? Are you convinced that your love for God can increase to a greater degree than it currently is? Are you persuaded that your desire and delight in the word of God can improve? Do you think you can develop a regular habit of serving others and enjoy doing so? Is it possible to enjoy telling others about Jesus as much as cheering for the Packers? God is able to do all this!

VI. Conclusion

A. Psalm 119:30-32 provides the basic formula for spiritual growth and is effective for personal transformation. Decide to follow Jesus. Stay attached to God's word. Be responsive to God's word. When we persist in these three spiritual habits, God will be at work in us to grow our heart for God. God will be working in us.

B. The basics of the Chrisitan life are really this simple. It's not complicated. It's not confusing. However, the Christian life while simple, is not easy. There are many challenges both inside us and outside us that make this simple spiritual growth process significantly difficult. Spiritual obstacles abound. The Chrisitan life can be explained and understood very simply so even small children can grasp it. At the same time, the Christian life is so challenging to live out that it takes a lifetime of practice.

[18] Daniel Im, *The Discipleship Opportunity: Leading a Great-Commission Church in a Post-Everything World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2024), 50.