# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“How I Love Your Word”**

**Psalm 119:9-16**

**August 12, 2018**

Most of us have memories of our parents from when we were growing up. My favorite memory of my father has to do with the morning. It seemed that no matter how early I would get out of bed, by dad would already be up having his daily time with God from God’s word. Most of the houses we lived in had a basement, and I remember him walking back and forth in the largest of the basement rooms, reading his Bible and memorizing his verses. I would quietly come into the room, sit in a comfortable chair or on the couch, and I would just watch him. He would see me and give me a smile, and continue his morning engagement with God.

My dad had a love for God’s word. He spent time in it, studied it, memorized it, preached and taught it, and discussed it with his family. It became a part of him and shaped who he was. I like to imagine that the writer of the 119th Psalm was a man a lot like my father. A lifetime of being with God through his word led him to write this 176-verse reflection on what the word of God meant to him. This morning we will deal with Psalm 119. Actually, being the word of God, Psalm 119 will deal with us, challenging us to consider what we believe about God’s word, what our attitude is toward God’s word, and what we are going to do about God’s word. I invite you to turn with me to Psalm 119, verses nine through sixteen

How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word.
I have tried hard to find you—don’t let me wander from your commands.
I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees.
I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us.
I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches.
I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways.
I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word.

Perhaps as he was writing this, the psalmist remembered what it was like to be a young man with all the temptations of life before him. How was he going to remain true to God? By obeying God’s word. God has given us this revelation, a text that makes known to us God’s desire for our lives. To live a pure life, a holy life, is to live God’s way, and that way is found right here. It is, however, not an easy way, as he reflects on in verse ten. Sometimes God’s will is hard to understand, and at other times the things we understand are hard to do. It is easy to wander in the ways of the world, to take the wide road of doing whatever feels right instead of the narrow road of obedience. Help me, Lord, he says, not to go wandering off, straying from your commands.

One of the ways to keep from wandering aimlessly through the ethical and moral judgments that we must make every day is to have God’s word in our heart. He says that he has hidden God’s word there in his innermost self. Another translation for the word “hidden” is “treasured.” This comes from the experience of people living in the ancient world where if you had anything of value, any treasure, you needed to hide it in order to protect it from thieves. What the psalmist is saying is that he has come to treasure God’s word in his heart, to value its help in navigating life, to consider it worth more to him than any earthly ethical or moral decision-making system. Safely tucked away in his heart, God’s word strengthens and guides him to follow God’s will.

In verse twelve he asks God to teach him God’s decrees, which is another term for God’s word. The psalmist knows what God’s word says, but what does it mean? In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, “You have heard it said . . . but I say to you.” Jesus is teaching the deeper meaning of God’s word. “You have heard it said, ‘Do not commit murder.’” That is what God’s word says – it is the sixth of the Ten Commandments. Now, Jesus is going to teach its deeper meaning. “I say to you that whoever hates his brother has committed murder against him in his heart.” Our prayer should be like the psalmists: “Teach me, Lord, the meaning of your word.”

Verse thirteen challenges us not to confine God’s word inside us but to tell it to others. When I prepare for a sermon or to teach a Wednesday evening class or to lead a Bible Study, there is a whole lot of God’s word working on me on the inside. But, as I share it with others in the worship service, in the class, or in the Bible Study, God’s word becomes an even stronger influence in my life, as God uses it not just in the lives of others, but even more so in my own life. When we tell others about we have found in God’s word, we get so much more out of it ourselves.

Another result of spending time in God’s word is the discovery of true wealth. Most of us wouldn’t ignore a ten-dollar bill on the ground. We would gladly pick it up and put it in our pocket. Yet we often ignore God’s Word which is his treasure chest filled with good things. Money is desirable as the means of procuring the necessities of life; but God’s word supplies the necessities of the soul. Worldly wealth can make us feel good, but God’s way produces true joy.

The psalmist not only spends time reading God’s word – he studies it and reflects on it. When I was about eight years old I spent a summer on a dairy farm. A familiar sight on the farm was that of cows lying in the field, chewing their cud. I learned from the farmer that the cows first fill their stomachs with grass, and then they settle down for a good, long chew, bringing the food back up from their stomachs and reworking what they have already eaten, thereby bringing out all the good nutrients of the grass which eventually are transformed into the rich milk the cows produce. Time-consuming? Yes. A waste of time? Not if you want to produce good milk. The psalmist is committed to doing a lot of mental chewing as he reads the word of God. No fast food for him. To be a healthy Christian, we can’t treat the Bible as snack food. For it to be spiritually nutritious, for it to produce the good in us that God desires, we need to spend quality time with it.

Lastly, he says that he delights in God’s decrees. The truth is that most of us chafe under decrees, for we think they restrict us from doing what we want. So it might sound strange to us to hear the psalmist say that he delights in God’s rules. But, what he has learned, and what we will learn as well if we give God’s word the chance to teach us, is that obedience is not a burden. It is not easy, for our sinful self is always demanding its own way, but it is freeing. It frees us from the disastrous consequences of sin, and it frees us for the living of our very best lives, the lives that God desires for us.

Do you recall the fable of the hard-working ant and the lazy grasshopper? During the summer months the industrious ant is busy gathering food for the coming winter. The grasshopper spends his days playing in the sunshine, all the while mocking the efforts of his friend the ant. The ant tries to warn the grasshopper of the coming winter, but the grasshopper only laughs as he pushes his hat over his eyes, preparing to take a nap. Soon winter arrives with its cold days, heavy snow, and long, even colder nights. The ant is snug in his den with plenty of food stored for the winter. The grasshopper, however, being unprepared, suffers from hunger.

You and I need to develop an ant-like daily determination to listen to God through his word, so we won’t fall prey to grasshopper complacency. I know it can be hard. We want to sleep just a little more rather than get up and make time to read God’s word. We have too much to do to spend time reading the Bible. The newspaper and the internet seem more interesting than Scripture. Besides, God’s word is sometimes hard to understand. We all know the excuses. Like my mom would say to me when I balked at doing something she asked of me, “It’s not that you cannot, Steve. It’s that you will not.” All of us *can* spend time in God’s word every day. *Will* we? Let us treasure God’s word in our hearts, for only when our hearts are filled with God can we know what is going on in his.