

THE VICTORY LIFE

in

PSALM 119

by

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CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW HORIZON

ALEPH.

**“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.
Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.**

**Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous
judgments.**

I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly”
(Psalms 119:1-8).

“Blessed are they that keep his testimonies . . . they walk in his ways” (Psalm 119:2, 3)

LOOK AT PSALM 119. What are your immediate impressions?

- That it is the longest and most perfect Psalm?
- That it is composed of 22 stanzas, each having 8 verses — 176 in all?
- That it is an alphabetical acrostic, each stanza beginning successively with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet?
- That the Holy Scriptures are referred to in all but three of its verses?

Your observations are quite correct.

But do you not see an individual living in this Psalm? Do you not observe the emotions and movements of a particular entity? In the first four verses, we meet a company of folk, people who have found *the better way*.

Then, so in keeping with the striking method of the Holy Spirit, a representative case is presented which weaves itself through the remainder of the Psalm with almost dramatic effect.

An unidentified individual, lured Godward by revealed knowledge and presented illustration, is seeking something richer, deeper, fuller. The narrative is both impressive and informative as it progressively unfolds, even strikingly vivid, making this portion of the sacred Scriptures, we believe, the most comprehensive treatise on the matter of victorious living to be found in the whole of the Bible.

Each of the twenty-two stanzas furnishes in logical sequence a pertinent contribution to the subject.

In the first stanza we note

- (1) the examples displayed,
- (2) the exhortation discovered, and
- (3) the experience desired.

High ideals are always commendable. Lofty ambitions are the hallmark of finer character; but the one who steadfastly desires the best that Heaven can offer to one yet on this earth has reached the apex of better judgment. This is what characterizes the personage in Psalm 119.

An individual emerges in verse 5. Because of the masculine pronoun in the first person singular and the reference to “**young**” in verse 9, we are encouraged toward the conclusion that the case history which we shall pursue is that of a young man.

The possibility of a holy life is established in the early part of the Psalm. Those enjoying it are pointed out for the psalmist's consideration and encouragement. There they are emblazoned on the horizon of divine revelation. They walked; they sought; they were satisfied. Whatever the formula, it worked!

Now is this way commended to others as being the most gratifying type of life. It is not only commended, it is enjoined upon the believer:

“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (v. 4).

This is an authoritative exhortation calling for a practical, personal application.

At once, the psalmist finds himself faced with a challenge. Either the cornea of his spiritual eye will have a sharp tendency to contract with this heavenly light or he will face it squarely. Should he turn from the light, he must wander in darkness. This is ever true.

Jesus said, **“He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”** And further, **“Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.”**

Robert Louis Stevenson felt that the darkness in the physical realm “passes lightly with its stars and dew and perfumes.”

Not so, however, in the spiritual.

The darkness is dreadful! Nor does it pass lightly. It settles upon the soul of a disobedient one with a depressive weight. The spaciousness of the open world emphasizes the minuteness of one's little self. Each step seems uncertain, and everything speaks. The stars do not twinkle; they flash rebuke. The dew is not refreshing, nor is the atmosphere perfumed. The soul is plagued with loneliness.

The psalmist has heard God speak. This is certain. And he specifically confirms the communication: **“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.”**

Two conclusions are apparent.

First, the way of heavenly design is not for a previous age or generation only. It is for all succeeding generations.

Second, the diligent observance of God's precepts is the means into such a hallowed way and the source of support in it.

This diligence is mandatory. It is enjoined upon the believer and constitutes a very serious personal responsibility.

No amount of reasoning can change the matter.

Arguments about God's will never bring peace and joy. There is no room for excuse. There is no place for compromise. But why is it so universally difficult to step resolutely into the revealed will of God?

- Why the hesitation to take a way that has such holy prospects?
- Why the reluctance to step decisively into a course so full of happy expectation?
- Why the reticence to pursue a pathway which is luminously studded with golden opportunities?
- Why remain in a way that has been condemned by the high court of Heaven?

In the final analysis (and it does not take long to reach this honest conclusion), it is purely a matter' of desire.

We do precisely what we want to do.

We go, as a rule, where we want to go. But when the heart wants above all else the sweet will of God, it moves steadfastly in that direction. Nothing can deter it. Finally, in the case before us, the objections begin to cease; the doubts begin to disappear; the pressure of indecision lessens. The answer is on its way!

“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes” (v. 5) is the expulsive heart-cry, freighted with convincing earnestness.

This is an eloquent expression of holy desire. It is equally a noble display of fine perception. A challenged life is moving in the right direction.

- Selfish tendencies are halted.
- Willfulness is relaxing.
- Self is giving way to the Spirit.

And when the way of man begins to coincide with the will of God, that one is then entering into a very favorable status. Never forget it; the heart is definitely capable of possessing such a holy longing. The number of people who manifest it is pitifully small. Here is one person who counted himself one with this blessed minority.

He had doubtless pondered carefully the examples which had been cited in verses 1 and 2. Now his admiration for them has grown stronger.

He is convinced that they had made the right choice to walk in the way of the undefiled; that they were shining lights in the orbit of divine approval in their day; that they would continue to shine as the stars forever (Daniel 12:3). They were those who had pleased God. This must now be the aim of his life.

“I shall not be ashamed” (v. 6), he announces with a distinct timber to his voice.

He is certain he will never regret the decision he has made. How could he be confounded? No one will ever rue the day he turned his life over to the Lord. They only will be ashamed who have failed to do so.

This is alarmingly suggested in John's epistle:

“And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (I John 2:28).

We may be absolutely sure the smile of Heaven shines upon those whose hearts are bent upon loving obedience to Him whose we are and whom we serve. This quiet assurance shows itself in the attitudes and actions.

Decision leads to devotion; devotion expresses itself in praise:

“I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,” he pledges, **“when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments”** (v. 7).

These righteous judgments about which he desires a fuller knowledge had already invaded his life with a perceptible effect.

- He has moved from the impersonal to the personal,
- He has moved from the general to the specific,
- He has moved from the past to the present,
- He has moved from the objective to the subjective.

Notice the development:

First, **“Blessed are they.”**

Then, “**Thou hast commanded us.**” Now, “**O that my ways were directed.**”

Too long have some of us failed to see the practical, personal aspect of divine instruction — how the Holy Spirit deals with the individual. The psalmist is at grips with God. It is manifested in his emotional outcries and in his actions. His theme song is, in essence,

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where these abound,
My aim, my prayer, is higher ground.

The venture has begun. Now the movement of his soul is upward, definitely upward, in spite of manifold hindrances and stubborn opposition. We are reminded of the poet, who, in a moment of wishful thinking, said: “If we could draw the curtain which surrounds each other's life; see the naked heart and spirit . . .”

This is precisely what is done for us so clearly in this Psalm.

The curtain has been drawn, and:

- We see the heart of an individual.
- We observe the emotional surges of his soul.
- We detect something of the longing of his heart.
- We rise in approval of his holy intentions.
- We bow in reverence at his sincere petitions.
- We witness with a sympathetic concern his unnecessary plunges into dismay.

Then, at last, we rejoice with him in the discovery of gladness in the victory which he gains. We share his surprise that the simple principle of spiritual reality was so long unrecognized.

How very helpful it is to have such an impressive array of examples in the opening verses of the Psalm!

How simply they are introduced! They were actual entities, people of like passions to people of all ages. But they knew the joy of walking with the Lord.

Why are they pronounced “blessed”?

Why? because they sought the Lord “**with the whole heart.**”

Half-heartedness could never be lauded in a heavenly announcement. The true standing, state and practice of the believer are suggested in the very first verse.

Let us note the chief value of these actual examples. If some have enjoyed such a rich spiritual status, then others likewise may have the same experience and the same accompanying blessing. The possibility is established.

The narrow way which leads to life, and eventually to the Homeland of glory, has felt the tread of countless feet. But those noble souls who have longed after God as the deer pants after the waterbrooks have left a deeper imprint.

Some of them have walked through fire and blood. Lashed to the stake, locked in the dungeon, lifted to the cross — these are but a few of the more difficult tests of devotion for many of the unfaltering stalwarts. Others, of course, were just as steadfast along a more tranquil pathway of equal devotion. It was such examples which arrested the attention and captivated the heart of the young man of Psalm 119.

When or where this vision came before his attention may not be important. Neither are the unmentioned circumstances which led up to it. But there are certain facts which are significant:

First, the experience of life on a higher plane is not only possible, but proved.
Second, it is evident that this kind of living results in the blessing of the Lord.
Third, the challenge involved is sufficiently strong to become a consuming passion in the soul of man.

Who would not be impressed with God-approved men and women?

- We revere the venerable Paul for his utter self-effacement and for his reckless abandon of personal comfort.
- We highly appreciate the pining heart of William Carey as he turned from his shoe cobbling to his quest for souls.
- We honor the memory of David Livingstone who willingly faced the rigors of pioneer missionary life.
- We tenderly regard the act of C. T. Studd in dispossessing himself of wealth in exchange for hardship indescribable as he sought the salvation of pagan men.

But let us be reminded that these mentioned luminaries in the orb of Christian dedication, together with their kind in every age, were no more specifically or directly called to sacrificial devotion than we are.

“**Thou hast commanded us,**” the psalmist reminds himself as he is stirred to a new sense of responsibility. He observes that it is not merely a suggestion that God's people walk the way of the undefiled, or a casually extended invitation to be a holy people.

It is definitely and decidedly a command.

To ignore it is a serious offense against the Most High. When God speaks, there is no alternative but to disobey, and disobedience is rebellion.

The psalmist came to the crossroads. He finds, as so many will testify, that one becomes prone to rationalize when the Holy Spirit seeks to turn the feet into the path of spiritual victory. The unconquered ego is amazingly successful in coming up with subtle objections.

God's way is one; man's way is another.

We either submit to God's way, or we persist in man's way, although we have our own adaptations. Wittingly or unwittingly, we develop a format for our lives; we insist upon a certain procedure; we nurture cherished ambitions. The very thought of forsaking a self-designed and self-satisfying course is most unwelcome, sometimes alarming.

A decision must be made. This is prerequisite!

And what Christian has not found himself in such a crisis. It is then that self is likely to make excuse. It will attempt to appease the conscience with vindictive counter-considerations. With the psalmist, indecision, indefiniteness, and indifference have given way to an honest proof of righteous sincerity.

It is interesting and informative to trace the footsteps of this seeker of God's favor.

The course ahead is not to be flower-strewn, as later experiences will reveal. But he is resolved to take the way of the faithful, the way of the undefiled, the way of those who have sought the Lord with all their hearts. His discernment will not always be the most admirable; his frequent outbursts of discouragement are far from exemplary; but his persistence, holy zeal and firm adherence to the Scriptures, propel him down the trail of triumph.

The testimony of this young man constitutes a compelling challenge to every one who would live godly in Christ Jesus and would know the victory of an overcoming life.

O souls that are seeking for pleasure,
Your follies and pleasures pursue;
Content with the prizes of fortune
This world is now offering to you.
But mine is a nobler ambition,
I seek for a richer reward;
I want to be Christlike and holy—
I want to be more like my Lord.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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