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Sermon Notes

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Bible Study Habits from an Expert

Psalm 119

I. Habits of the Heart

- A. The Parable of the River Stone
- B. Goal of Sanctification: A Matter of the Heart
 - 1. Loving God with all your heart
 - 2. Loving your neighbor
 - 3. Obedience to God's commands the center to a life of love
 - 4. Obedience must be joyful! Glad obedience is the goal of sanctification
- C. The incredible transforming power of the word
- D. The daily quiet time: immersed in the river

Illus. George Mueller's discovery

- E. This is how we hear from God... (not just the "still, small voice")

II. Habits with the Word

- A. Attitudes

Illus. "Entry posture diagram"... what attitude do you bring to your time in the word?

- 1. Seeking and yearning with all your heart

30 I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws.

45 I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

58 I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.

94 Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts.

- a. half-hearted creatures!
- b. start by asking God for passion after His word
- c. this will feed on itself!

Illus. Dividends reinvested

- 2. Awe, fear, trembling

120 *My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.*

161 *Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word.*

- a. Moses trembled with fear in the presence of God
- b. God's word is terrifyingly powerful, amazingly insightful, dazzlingly bright
- c. think: "I am about to enter the Holy of Holies to listen to the very words of God"
- d. The Eternal God is about to speak to you... to you personally... and that is awesome!

3. Obedience

34 *Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*

145 *I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.*

- a. we can't expect to gain anything from our time with God if we're holding on to some precious sin habit
- b. God expects full rejection of sin... though we still sin daily
- c. if you enter your time in the word with unconfessed sin, you will be hindered from hearing His word
- d. but if you enter with an open heart, ready to obey anything He tells you to do, then your time will be rich and profitable

4. Expectancy

131 *I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.*

- a. enter the word with expectancy
- b. "I am confident God will teach me something new"

18 *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*

- c. These discoveries will bring me incredible joy and insight
- d. I CAN'T WAIT!!!
- e. this comes with experience... the more you see in Scripture, the more expectancy you'll have next time!

5. Thankfulness

62 *At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.*

- a. thank God in advance for what He's going to do
- b. God is freeing you from the bondage of sin, lavishing on you the riches of grace
- c. Thank Him in advance! This shows faith

Summary: as you enter your time with God and His word, do so with a whole heart, one which trembles with awe at the thought of hearing God speak, one which is ready to obey whatever He tells you, one that fully expects to hear Him speak, one that is thankful in advance for what you are about to hear.

B. Actions and Habits

1. The power of habit

56 *This has been my practice: I obey your precepts.*

This Psalmist had regular habit patterns of prayer, praise, Scripture intake, and obedience... this was no quick fad, but a deep lifestyle

- a. daily habits exert powerful influence on character
- b. thirty day experiments can lead to permanent lifestyle changes

2. Prayer for instruction and insight from God

18 *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*

34 *Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.*

73 *Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.*

102 *I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.*

124 *Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees.*

169 *May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.*

- a. remember that the entire Psalm is a prayer to God
- b. this is a conversation... God speaks through His word, you answer back in prayer
- c. God's word is incredibly deep... God will not give insight except to spiritual beggars

3. Reading and recounting

13 *With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.*

How beautiful when God's mouth speaks and our mouths follow, speaking the same words!!

Here, Psalmist recounts the laws... line by line, reads them and restates them

- a. the word enters word by word, concept by concept
- b. God feeds you his truth when His words enter your mind and rest in your heart
- c. begin by reading the verses out loud, recounting them, savoring each thought
- d. "recount" is best done in prayer: "God, you are saying _____ to me..."
- e. this is the basis of meditation and memorization... murmuring over the words

4. Meditation

15 *I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.*

23 *Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.*

27 *Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.*

95 *The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes.*

97 *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*

99 *I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.*

148 *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.*

- a. sermons go in one ear and out the other
- b. words flow in one eye and out the other... without meditation
- c. definition: chewing thoughtfully over each concept
 - i) learn to ask questions of the text
 - ii) put concepts in your own words
 - iii) writing ideas down with pen & notebook helps focus thought
 - iv) keep asking deeper questions of each portion
 - v) relate one section to the next: look for logical connectors like “so that”, “Therefore,” “However,”

5. Memorization

11 *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

- a. Gutenberg’s Bible revolutionized personal devotional life
- b. before that, most people had to memorize or they had no daily access to Scripture
 - Priests and kings had personal copies of Scripture
- c. memorization is simply repetition over time... engraving with an iron tool on a stone tablet
- d. powerful impact on my daily life
- e. memorization a foundation to meditation

97 *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*

How is that possible unless we have it memorized? Most people then didn’t have Bibles; most of us now don’t have freedom to meditate all day long... unless we have it memorized!

6. All hours of the day

55 *In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law.*

62 *At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.*

147 *I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.*

148 *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.*

164 *Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.*

Illus. Monks had set times for prayer and meditation on God's word... we lead hurried, unreflective lives that are shallow. Test comes when suffering comes!

- a. Jesus' example: early in the morning, began with God
 - b. Psalmist: all hours of the day available to personal Scriptural exercises
 - c. sometimes it is beneficial to stay up all night studying Scripture
 - d. throughout the day, return to Scripture and to your commitments
7. Remember the goal: understanding with a view to glad obedience to our eternal God!!

C. Responses and Commitments

1. Searching your heart/life by the word

26 I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.

59 I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.

- a. the word of God is like a searchlight or a surgeon's scalpel

168 I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you.

- b. bring each part of your life under the probing insight of the word
- c. humility and confidence before God is the key here
- d. when you are convicted, repent and ask God to seek you & bring you back

176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

2. Prayer for obedience

5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!

10 I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.

29 Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.

35 Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.

36 Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.

37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

80 May my heart be blameless toward your decrees, that I may not be put to shame.

133 Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.

145 I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.

146 I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes.

- a. once understanding comes, now is the time for obedience
- b. we CAN'T obey without God's direct help
- c. God gives that help to the spiritual beggar
- d. Augustine: "Give what you command and command what you will."
- e. look at commands as promises: this is what God wants to work in you
- f. this outlook leads to joyful not grumbling obedience

3. Determined choosing

30 *I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws.*

112 *My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.*

- a. the will must move out now
- b. determine that you will choose God's word as the path of your life
- c. the will is the iron behind the promises and vows you will make

4. Promises and vows

- a. should we make vows or not?

Matthew 5:33-34 *"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all..."*

James 5:12 *Above all, my brothers, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.*

- b. psalmist did... regularly

57 *You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words.*

106 *I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.*

- c. take your insight and make a commitment before God that you will live this way as a result
- d. be specific and measurable

Illus. Jonathan Edwards's resolutions, 1722 (age 18)

- e. write down your promises to God

Resolved, To study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

Resolved, That I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration.

Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty, and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general.

Resolved, Never to lose one moment of time, but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

Resolved, Never to do any thing, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

Resolved, To maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.

f. be humble: "With God's help, I will endeavor to do _____."

Edwards wrote: "Being sensible that I am unable to do any thing without God's help, I do humbly intreat Him by His grace to enable me to keep these resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to His will, for Christ's sake."

g. link it to specific texts of the Bible you have meditated on

5. Worship and rejoicing

a. finish by worshipping the God who has spoken to you

48 I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees

108 Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.

164 Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.

b. remember: God is good and all His commands are good for you

68 You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.

c. remember also: the goal is not merely obedience, but GLAD OBEDIENCE

32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

d. everything God wants to do in your life will lead to your joy and fruitfulness

e. therefore, sing and worship from your heart to the Lord

54 Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge.

172 May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.

f. NOTE: the best worship streams right from texts of Scripture... God loves to hear His word recited back to Him

The goal of our study of Scripture and our obedience to His commands is that we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

2 Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.

John 17:3 "Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

John 17:17 "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

Resolve today that you will devote yourself to Scriptural disciplines