

How to Restore Your Heart

Bible 101:

Psalms 119:9-11

November 11, 2007

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The local newspaper has a new person handling our weekly church advertisement. When the secretary phoned her with today's sermon title "How to Restore Your Heart," the new woman responded, "Fish oil!" I suspect that some of our biological hearts could use fish oil. However, the heart of a living soul has a lot worse enemies than plaque lining blood vessels. By walking this very earth, we breathe in stuff that is toxic to our souls, that damages the hearts through which see and live our lives.

Many years ago, I went on a trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. We portaged and paddled our way into some of the most isolated and pristine lakes in Canada, lakes that had not been contaminated by short-sighted human decisions. The water was pure and cold, and as my canoe glided along I took my dip cup and drank right from the middle of the lake. There was no unsafe bacteria count. There were no floating algae. The water was pure and refreshing. That experience is what companies seek to simulate when they sell us bottled water.

When I think of a restored heart, I think of a pure heart or life that like those lakes is healthy and refreshing. I think of a person unfazed and uncorrupted by evil. I think of a person who blesses and revives our courage. When I see a child living in innocence, I see a little one whose trust and joy has not been spoiled by temptation and trials. Similarly, when I see older but pure hearts, I see people whose lives are not defined by their personal temptations and trials, but

by God's love and faithfulness. Like that pristine Canadian lake, you can dip your cup into the pool of their words and deeds and be refreshed.

Is such a heart and life possible in a world so challenging and tainted by evil? Is it possible for us given our painful history and circumstance? I know that some of us have suffered terrible trauma, and some of us struggle daily with shame, loss and defeat. I want you to know that your heart and all of ours can be as pure and refreshing as a pristine lake. I want you to believe that this is the destiny God has for you and the path he marks out for you.

Open your Bible again to Psalm 119, verse 9 (page 492). Let's read it aloud together:

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. (Psalm 119:9-11, NLT)

In this written text, God breathes into David the answer to the hunger of his heart: how to stay pure in a corrupt world and know God intimately.

Last week, we (not just me, but a team) opened this series, called Bible 101. We talked about having a personal Bible that you use to acquire the thoughts of God. We encouraged you to mark it. Use brackets, underline or highlight text. Note when and where each text came to your attention. With these notes learn how God actually lifts to your attention certain thoughts. Again, I invite you to bring your Bible or purchase one here. We have three or four kinds of Bibles on the book table, so look them over. Choose a translation and edition that fits your reading level and current interest.

Let me say a word as to why there are so many kinds of Bibles. First, there are about 70 translations of the full Bible into English. A Bible translation is the work of a scholar or team of scholars who take the texts in their original language and rewrite them into a language we can read and understand. The first English Bible was translated by William Tyndale in the 1520s. As

a Catholic priest, he wanted a boy driving a plow in England to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope in Rome. Most translations come from that desire to help people read the Bible. The translators realize that nothing has a more profound effect on their lives, and they want to pass that on. Sometimes, these translations are called versions: the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version. In addition, to translations there are paraphrases, rewrites of the English, so for example, children can read the Bible and understand it. Second, there are Bible editions as well as Bible translations. Bible editions like the Life Application Bible, the Study Bible, the Devotional Bible, or the Teen Bible present the translated text with special aids or help so that the reader can better learn and apply the Bible to their situation. The editors don't change the text. They change how it is presented with notes, pictures, graphics and other aids. Thus, we have translations and editions of those translations. I don't doubt that Bible publishers are trying to make money. I think that is not the only motive, or even the primary one. In so many cases, people in these fields have been profoundly changed by the words of Scripture and sense a call to help others. So let's go back to the Bible.

When in Psalm 119 David asks about how a young person can stay pure, he is not just thinking about lust. He is thinking about depression, jealousy, bitterness, greed. He is thinking about selfish ambition, arrogance, cowering fear and everything that displeases God and destroys human beings. These are toxins. When someone threatens you, what happens to your thinking? When you are belittled, ridiculed, insulted or manipulated, what happens to your heart? When you fall into sin or struggle with addiction, what becomes of your heart? It becomes a pond where the water is toxic. Your thoughts and feelings and the actions they drive hurt you. Your relationships suffer. Soon, your whole life, including your health, is impacted by the bad water, even if it is mostly good water slightly laced with a few lethal toxins. The effects are harmful.

Let's project the text. The answer to staying pure is found in these words:

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. (Psalm 119:9-11, NLT)

The key to a restored heart, the key to maintaining a pure heart is found, not in some self-help book, but in our relationship with God and his word. God created us for a life of relationship with him. God created us for a life of love and fruitfulness. We cannot be close to God or pure in heart if we ignore or dismiss his word. We value persons when we value their word. We love God only when we treasure both him and his word. If we disobey God, we do not value his word. We do not trust his judgment. We do not trust his character or his love.

We are not to receive God's word as some impersonal law. We are to receive it as an expression of his love and wisdom. That is why David wrote, "***I have tried hard to find you,***" or as another translation puts it: "***I seek you with all my heart: do not let me stray from your commands***" (Psalm 119:10, NIV). It is all about relationship.

David closes this subject with the words: "***I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.***" The Hebrew word translated *hidden* actually means to secure as treasure. I've hidden your words from the thieves. I've sheltered your word from the elements that would blow it away. I've treasured your word so that I won't lose it. They're life to me. That's what cleans up the toxins and prevents us from missing God's purpose, from falling short of God's glory, from sinning. Do you treasure God's words that way? Are you reading the Bible and treasuring its words?

Turn with me to Psalm 19, verses 7 through 11 (page 439 and 440 in the Pew Bible).

Let's read the passage together:

The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.
(Psalm 19:7-11, NLT)

In love God has placed his word into your hands. What will you do with it?