Aleph

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.
2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.
4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.
7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.
8 I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

Beth

9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.
10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.
11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.
13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.
14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.
CHAPTER THREE

Gimel

17 Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

19 I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

20 My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

21 Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.

22 Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

23 Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

24 Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

CHAPTER FOUR

Daleth

25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

26 I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.

27 Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

28 My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

29 Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

30 I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

31 I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.

32 I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

He

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.
34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

38 Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

39 Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

CHAPTER SIX

Vau

41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.

42 So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.

44 So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.

45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

46 I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Zain

49 Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

50 This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.
52 I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.

53 Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

54 Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

55 I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.

56 This I had, because I kept thy precepts.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Cheth

57 Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.

58 I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.

59 I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

60 I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

61 The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

62 At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.

63 I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

CHAPTER NINE

Teth

65 Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word.

66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

69 The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

70 Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.
71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

72. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

CHAPTER TEN

Jod

73. Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

74. They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

75. I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

76. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

77. Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

78. Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

79. Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

80. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Caph

81. My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

82. Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

83. For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

84. How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

85. The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.

86. All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.

87. They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

88. Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.
CHAPTER TWELVE

Lamed

89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.

90 Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

91 They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

93 I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

94 I am thine, save me: for I have sought thy precepts.

95 The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

96 I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mem

97 O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

98 Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

102 I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

103 How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Nun

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.

109 My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Samech

113 I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.

114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

115 Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

116 Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

117 Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

118 Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.

119 Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.

120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Ain

121 I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.

122 Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.

123 Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.
124 Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.
125 I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.
126 It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.
127 Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.
128 Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Pe

129 Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.
130 The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.
131 I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.
132 Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.
133 Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.
134 Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.
135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.
136 Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Tzaddi

137 Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.
138 Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.
139 My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.
140 Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.
141 I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.
142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.
143 Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.

144 The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Koph

145 I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.

146 I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

147 I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.

148 Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.

150 They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.

151 Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.

152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Resh

153 Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

155 Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.

157 Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

158 I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.
160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Schin

161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

162 I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.

163 I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.

164 Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.

167 My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.

168 I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Tau

169 Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.

170 Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.

171 My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.

172 My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.

175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTION

The Psalms as a book are probably the most read of all Scripture and yet one Psalm in particular is often overlooked simply because of its length and that is Psalm 119. It contains 176 verses and is longer than many of Paul’s letters. We like to be able read and digest portions of Scripture that are palatable to us and 176 verses just doesn’t fit the bill. However, almost as if David knew that this would be the case, he split it into twenty two stanzas of eight verses each. This is unusual because the Bible wasn’t written with natural breaks of chapters and verses but flowed in the same way as a letter. Chapters and verses were a man-made addition to aid the reading of the Word. They were added in the fifteenth century by Santi Pagnini but it was the Geneva Bible (mainly produced from an earlier translation by William Tyndale and Myles Coverdale) that these divisions became the norm.

This Psalm has a natural division because each stanza begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. Each line of each stanza begins with the stanza’s Hebrew letter and is tied thematically to the Hebrew letter pictographically, that is it is similar to written Chinese which uses a symbol denoting a value or meaning.

Psalm 119 uses ten key words that we find in each of the verses, except for verse 122. These give us an insight into God’s Word itself and are:

1. Torah - instruction.
2. Edut - testimonies, witnesses
3. Derek - way
4. Pikudin - precepts
5. Chokim - statutes
6. Mitzupt - commandments, ordinances
7. Mishuptim - judgments, ordinances
8. Davar - word
9. Imrah - word
10. Tzedek - righteousness

There are four words which are vital to our understanding of this Psalm which I will define as:

Law It appears twenty nine times and refers to the Mosaic Law in its narrowest sense but to the Scriptures as a whole in which God communicates His will and purpose to man.

Testimonies It appears twenty three times and it relates to bearing witness to the truth. The implication is that God’s Word is His affirmation of the truth.

Precepts It appears twenty one times and refers to the fixed orders that emanate from a master to a servant and also to boundaries, across which we shall never venture.
Commandments  It appears twenty one times and emphasises the authority of God as the Supreme Being, the One who has issued the orders we are to obey. These are not suggestions as to living a life for God but standing orders.

Psalm 119 is a personal testimony sharing the joys and tribulations of being a disciple of God. Throughout we will find the use of phrases such as “O how I love thy law” (v.97). David is nothing if not exuberant in his praises for God because he goes on to say:

- I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved (v.47).
- Thy law do I love (v.113).
- I love thy testimonies (v.119)
- I love thy commandments above gold (v.127).
- Thy servant loveth it (v.140).
- Consider how I love thy precepts (v.159).
- Thy law do I love (v.163).
- I love them exceedingly (v.167).

In addition, David also uses the expression quicken me (renew my life; revive me or bring me back to life) and he uses it in direct connection to the Word of God:

- Quicken thou me according to thy word (v.25).
- Quicken thou me to thy way (v.37).
- Quicken thou me in thy righteousness (v.40).
- Thy word hath quickened me (v.50).
- Quicken me after thy lovingkindness (v.88).
- Thou hast quickened me (v.93).
- Quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word (v.107).
- O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgments (v.149, 156)
- Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness so shall I keep the testimonies of thy mouth (v.159).

We are used to calling the Bible, God’s Word of the Scriptures but here in this Psalm, David calls it by ten different names:

- God’s law.
- His Commandment(s)
- His Word(s).
- His way(s).
- His judgment(s).
- His precepts.
- His statutes.
- His testimony or testimonies.
- His righteousness.
- His truth.
In some ways it does not matter what we call it, so long as read it, study it, and we seek to understand it. As David found, the written Word of God provided him with:

- Blessedness (v.2)
- Honour (v.6)
- Cleansing (v.9)
- Delight (v.24)
- Counsel (v.24)
- Answers (v.42)
- Freedom (v.45)
- Hope (v.49)
- Comfort (v.50)
- Quickening (v.50)
- Songs (v.54)
- Riches (v.72)
- Wisdom (v.98)
- Sweetness (v.103)
- Understanding (v.104)
- Guidance (v.105)
- Heritage (v.111)
- Truth (v.142)
- Peace (v.165)
- Help (v.175).

Throughout this Psalm we find the ups and downs of human emotions as David did. He felt longing (v.20); horror (v.53); fear (v.120); sorrow (v.136); anguish (v.143); grief (v.158); joy (v.162); aversion (v.163); and peace (v.165). This mirrors our daily existence when at one moment we feel jubilant, enriched or comforted while at other times we feel faint and require comforting.

I cannot recommend this Psalm enough to each one of you for personal study as it is a hymn book of praise to Almighty God, a prayer book, a book of evidence of the One who created us and sustains us day by day and also a training guide for living holy and righteous lives before God.
CHAPTER ONE

Aleph

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Those who seek to walk in the way of the LORD are to be blessed (made perfectly happy) because they are undefiled. The word undefiled means blameless or upright; people with integrity. It is something for which Christians are often vilified because we have integrity, that is we have moral principles and are honest and will stand firm in the face of hostility against God. The opposite of integrity is duplicity (a very under-used word these days meaning deception or double-dealing) and hypocrisy which means to profess certain standards in life which are contrary to what we believe, say or do.

This opening verse takes us straight back to the opening of Psalm 1, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD: and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2).

We all aspire after happiness but we do have a bad track record of finding it by ourselves. We will travel down any and every highway hoping it will lead to what we most desire and when we cannot find it, we set our sights on other pathways. For some, theirs is a lifelong search that gets them nowhere. They end up in countless cul-de-sacs. Their “happiness” is but for a season, if at all, and does not last. True happiness can only be found in God as portrayed through the law of the LORD.

The law – Hebrew word Torah – does not refer to the narrow confines of the Ten Commandments and other portions of the law given to the Israelites by God, but to the whole Word of God, the Bible. Now it is obvious that the whole Bible had not been completed at the time of David’s writings and what had been written had not been collated into the Old Testament. However, the Scriptures themselves, while they cannot be added to or subtracted from (Revelation 22:18), are ever relevant to us no matter how near or how far away we are in terms of time from when they were written. The Word of God is like adding creosote to wood, it acts as a preservative that will protect from decay but for it to be effective, it must be re-applied time and time again. So too, we are to walk, not once, but constantly in the way of God’s Word, to read it, to study it, to let the words flow over us until it becomes a part of us. Then we will be truly happy.

We must be careful not to fall into the trap laid by the devil and propounded by those false teachers who say that the only way to true happiness is through the gospel of prosperity. As Christians we do not have a right to be healthy or wealthy, indeed Paul writing to Timothy said, “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). We were never told it would be a bed of roses as a Christian and yet these false teachers tell us that it is somehow our fault that God is not blessing us. If you are of a similar way of thinking, then look carefully at the words of this Psalm. It is those who walk according to Scripture who will be truly happy, not those who listen to the charlatans peddling the prosperity gospel.
2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

Once again we are told that we will be truly happy if we keep His (God’s) testimonies. A testimony is a legal term meaning a statute which is a permanent rule to be found in a formal document. The formal document in this instance is the Bible and the permanent rules are what God has decreed over the centuries; the perfections of God, the holiness of God, the justice of God and the goodness of God. I have come across one or two Christians over the years who have said that their God is a God of love and could never be involved in casting out those who do not believe. In John’s gospel we are told, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my Word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:25) (confirmed by John 3:15-21; John 6:47; John 11:25; John 12:46; John 20:31; Romans 10:9) If we aim to keep these testimonies, that is, we hear his Word, we believe His Word and we confess our sins to Almighty God, then we shall be saved be truly happy.

True happiness is reserved for those that keep his testimonies and “seek him with the whole heart”. This is not an academic exercise but a life experience that we are talking about here. If we seek the Lord wholeheartedly then we will find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). We are told in Proverbs 18:10 that, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous will run into it, and is safe”. In Matthew’s gospel in what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened up to you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8).

Being a Christian is not a matter of clocking in and out as we might do at work but is a 24 hour, 7 day a week occupation. Likewise we do not get to choose what bits we like and leave the rest of God’s Word. There are far too many who already ignore the first seven chapters of Genesis because it causes them a few problems. The Christian life is one of wholehearted passion, acknowledging the One who created us, the One who sustains us day by day, the One who died for us and the One who will one day judge each and every one of us. We do not just wear a Sunday mask that comes off for the rest of the week. As Christians we live for Jesus Christ every moment of every day and in every situation, no matter how hard it may be.

3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.

A Christian will sin, of that there is no doubt (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8), however, he will also live without keeping sin in his life. That is, he will not allow sin to dominate his life. We are told in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”. Why should this happen? Further along in Romans 5:12 we are given the answer. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”. We thank God that this was not the end because He sent His only Son Jesus into the world to take on the mantle of a man in order that he might take our rightful place in judgment. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
As a consequence, a Christian will seek to follow God’s path, narrow though it may be (Matthew 7:14). He will seek to walk in the ways set out by Jesus through His Word. The Scriptures tell us to walk:

- in newness of life (Romans 6:4),
- by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7),
- in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16),
- worthily (Ephesians 4:1),
- in love (Ephesians 5:2),
- wisely (Ephesians 5:15),
- in the light (1 John 1:7),
- following Christ’s example (1 John 2:6),
- in the truth (3 John 3).

4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

When God commands then He expects us to obey. As Christians we have the Word of God as our guide. It provides us with all we know to live a holy life. The modern world teaches moral relativism, in other words, there is no right or wrong. The Scriptures teaches us that everything that is against God’s Word is sin and is to be avoided (Isaiah 55:7; Hebrews 12:1). Likewise, it teaches us that the LORD knows no sin. “The just LORD is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame” (Zephaniah 3:5).

We are to keep the Lord’s precepts diligently. Precepts are instructions laid down by God in Scripture and apply to us whether we be Pastor or lay person. There is not one law for the rich and another for the poor. All are bound by His decrees. We obey because they are for our benefit. God commands not because He has an ego that must be assuaged, but because He really does know what is best for us. Jesus said that we should, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). If we are to become like Jesus, then we must learn how to be holy, how to be perfect in His sight.

“This Psalm encourages us all to move from the third person (vv.1-3) to the second person (vv.4-176), from truth to adoration, from doctrine to prayer. And it is a passionate prayer” 1

5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

From the true happiness to be felt by those who obey God’s commands in the first three verses we move quickly to David’s own position before Almighty God. It is a long sigh, the kind we often mutter ourselves when in prayer and wishing to move on. However, like David, we often have something in our lives that is preventing us from doing so. David is here wishing that he could be directed to keep God’s statutes, (the word means engraved or cut so signifying something that is permanent or fixed) but like David too, we are often people of the moment, we struggle to stay permanently with anything and especially God’s Word where we have the added pressure of the devil whispering in our ears.
As the Ten Commandments were chiselled in stone for all time, so God’s Word is also cast in stone, never to be altered. They are not a whim of God’s that He might change at a moment’s notice. God is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He will not change and we thank the Lord for that because we know from day to day where we stand with Him. Imagine what it would be like if we did not know what to expect from Him and it all depended upon what mood He was in.

This is not the first time that David has sought God’s help to show him the way to righteousness. “Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (Psalm 5:8) (See also Psalm 25:5; Psalm 27:11; Psalm 143:10). David was at times a very Godly man but at other times, just like us, he had doubts and would waiver. This is one of those moments when he wants confirmation from God. There is nothing wrong with being honest with the One who knows the secrets of our hearts (Psalm 17:3; Psalm 44:21; Psalm 139:44). When our spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41), call out to God and He will hear you. He will strengthen you, He will stand beside us and never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

The desire of one who is proud to call himself a Christian, one who has yielded to the lure of Jesus, one who has accepted his own sinfulness and his utter dependency of the risen Saviour, is to obey all of God’s laws and commandments. A Christian will do so from a sincere heart, wishing to obey as Jesus Himself obeyed His own Father (John 6:38).

A Christian will rightly have great respect for God’s Word as it shows us the way to live and the way to life itself. When a Christian backslides, the first bit of the armour to be discarded is the reading of the Word. The reason is to be found in James 1:23 where we are likened to looking into a mirror and seeing ourselves as we truly are. The Scriptures do not lie and therefore we see ourselves as vile sinners, worthy only of God’s divine judgment. It shows us “warts and all”. It was Oliver Cromwell, who only wanted his portrait to show a true reflection of his face that showed us what true Christianity was all about. We might be able to fool our fellow man, but we cannot fool God. “I desire you would use all your skill to paint your picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughness, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me; otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it”.

7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

True praise is reserved for God! Unfortunately we live in an age where individuals become “stars” overnight and the fans of these stars will praise them all the time. Our praise is reserved for One that deserves it, Almighty God. In Acts 16 we find the story of Paul and Silas who were imprisoned following an incident where a young girl was set free from demon possession. The mob had them both whipped and the jailer had them both locked into stocks. At midnight something quite extraordinary
happened. “Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:25). Their first thoughts should have been the pain that was undoubtedly coming from their whipped backs but instead they praised God.

Paul and Silas were both wonderful examples of what Paul later wrote in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”. They were both acutely aware that it doesn’t matter what circumstances the found themselves in, that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, Therefore will not we fear” (Psalm 46:1-2).

David said that he will praise God “with uprightness of heart”. An upright heart is one that is right with God. A person, who with God’s help resolves to follow God’s commandments, His law, His Word, His ordinances, His testimonies, His statutes, His precepts or His sayings.

David is declaring that he has a long way to go before he will “have learned thy righteous judgments”. Like all of us, we should continue to be lifelong students of God’s Word, freely acknowledging that we will never know all that God has given to us. In so doing, we cannot get above ourselves into the realms of the Pharisees whose embellishment of God’s original decrees led the Jewish people to always consider themselves to be failures. God likes humility and He loves humble people. “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14). James writing in his letter says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). When a Pastor goes into the pulpit to preach God’s Word Sunday after Sunday, he does not do so from his memory, but only after he has gone back to God, in prayer and humility, and sought His face regarding what to say. I have a bad memory which is why I use full notes when I preach and I have preached the same sermon more than once. However, this does not stop me from being in the study every day, ready to listen to what God has to say to me.

8 I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.

As if in answer to himself, David says that he will keep God’s statutes. This gives us something of an insight into David himself because when he set his mind on doing something, he generally accomplished it. He was determined in his own mind to obey what God had laid down for him. Even though he knew what it was to be found wanting, he knew too what it was to be forgiven of his sins. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and she bore him a child. When it was pointed out to him by Nathan the Prophet what he had done, he immediately said, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Samuel 12:13). God struck down the baby and it died and it is reported in verse 20 that, “Then David arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped”. David’s sin had repercussions that David accepted and he worshipped God who had judged him.
David’s cries not to forsake him utterly shows his utter dependence upon God. He accepted his earlier sins and the consequences for them but knows that if God was to forsake him completely, the he would be lost. We cannot do anything under our own steam, but only under the enabling of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. I know of people who will tell me that they are dependent upon no one. I am justly proud that my dependence upon God is absolute. I can do nothing unless God is with me every step of the way. I have tried to do things on my own but they never work. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:5-7).
CHAPTER TWO

Beth

9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

How shall a young man keep his way pure? That is the question being posed by David. Why a young man and an older one? It is probably because the younger males lack any sort of experience or maturity and definitely lack wisdom. The book of Job tells us that, “With the ancient is wisdom; and in length of days understanding” (Job 12:12). I wonder if this means I have a way to go yet before I obtain wisdom or that I have already got it but don’t wish to be known as “ancient”? In Proverbs 13:1 we are further told that “A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke”. The main point of this first part of the verse is that applies to anyone, no matter what his age. We have all come across young people who are wise beyond their years and those of far more advanced age who are still going through their second childhood.

The answer to the question is to be found in the second half of the verse. It is by actively taking heed, not just in our head but through our actions. In other words, what we hear we need to put into practice. We are told in Ephesians 5:1-3, “Be ye therefore, followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks”. Paul told us again in 2 Timothy 2:22 that we must, “flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”.

10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

David was here saying that when he sought the LORD, he did so not holding anything back. It was with his whole heart, or to put it another way, he threw himself into this action. “In the Bible, the ‘heart’ is not a synonym for the emotions. It contains’ the springs of life’ that affect thought and desire, speech and action (Proverbs 4:23-27; 23:26). The heart is the person in miniature” 3

This is seen through what Luke had to say, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). The heart is bursting to tell others of what is stored there, either good or evil. But those that seek God will find Him and as He says in Jeremiah 24:7, “I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart”.

21
We are not chained to God and have freedom to wander from Him which is why David specifically asks for help in this direction. He doesn’t want to wander but recognises that he cannot stop himself without Divine help. Oh Lord grant us the same desire that we may seek you with our whole heart and having found you that you would help us to stay with you for ever.

11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

God’s Word was very dear to David as it should be to us and he says that he has hidden it in his heart. This does not mean that he has hidden it from view so that no one knew where his allegiances lay, but rather that it is hidden for safety’s sake, it is kept away from the pollution of the world so that it might be presented to him whole and pure. From the previous verse we learned that the heart is the person in miniature so it also means that God’s Word is very important to him. It will help to shape him (and us) from within. It will help bring back to remembrance those portions of Scripture that can help us in times of trouble or when we need to counsel people and do not have our Bibles with us. The more we know the Word of God, the more we will find ourselves pricked at times of temptation. It is not a way of stopping us sinning but it helps that apart from our own consciences, we also have God speaking to us through his memorized Word.

The reason David gave for keeping His Word hidden in his heart is that he might not sin. He was acutely aware of the lure and the power of sin, how attractive it could be made to look by the devil. However, he wasn’t one of those who like the ostrich literally buries his head in the sand in order that he cannot see his enemy, and an enemy is what sin is and it should be dealt with as such. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10). David had no intention of calling God a liar which is why he freely acknowledges that he is a sinner and but for the grace of God, would be dead in his trespasses and sins.

12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

Praise be to You O LORD! This is what David was saying here at the start of this twelfth verse. It is not the first time that he has used such words either:

“Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplication” (Psalm 28:6).

“Blessed be the LORD: for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city” (Psalm 31:21).

“Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me” (Psalm 66:20).

“Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah” (Psalm 68:19).
The Lord our God is to be praised because he answers our prayers, shows us his kindness and showers us with His benefits.

David’s plea is that God might teach him His statutes. The Hebrew word huquim translated here as statutes means to engrave or inscribe and gives the sense of permanency. It is in fact, a prescribed written law that will not change. We all need to learn so who do we turn to for our teaching? Charles Bridges wrote that “Man’s teaching puffeth up – God’s teaching humbleth. Man’s teaching may lead us into error as well as into truth – God’s teaching is “the unction from the Holy One, by which we know all things” (1John 2:20). Man’s teaching may make us more learned – God’s teaching makes us more holy. It persuades while it enlightens. It draws the heart, inclines the will, and carries out the soul to Christ (John 6:44-45)”

When we know the boundaries that have been set by God, we are less likely to cross them and the more likely we are to stay on the narrow path that leads unto eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14).

13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.

This is David’s declaration of faith in the Living God. All that he has heard from God’s mouth, that is, all that has been written in the Scriptures, David pronounces that he has declared with his own lips to others. He is doing the job of a Pastor. He was doing as Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 4:13, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak”. David spoke of what he believed in. He was able to imitate God by repeating what He had spoken. “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9).

The good news that we seek to impart to others (the gospel) is good for ourselves and good for others as well. It should be a joy for us to pass on what we have learned from God. However, we must be mindful of the fact that we are told in Psalm 141:3 to, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips”. David knew that his lips could be used to praise God or to speak evil. “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Psalm 34:13).

14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

David is ecstatic about the testimonies of God because they are the test for a Christian. How close are we to them? We will never get that close but when we can feel ourselves edging towards them even a little, then we have a right to be truly happy. The testimonies bear witness to Almighty God, His Character and Being and are set as a guide for us. It is accepted that He is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (all seeing) because these are Divine traits. But He is also:

- gentle (Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Corinthians 10:1)
All of these traits are attainable if we put our trust in God. It means that we must be steeped in His Word, it means that we put our lives into His keeping, but we can attain them, high though they may be. We will fail to achieve such high levels but at least we can try.

In what do we put our confidence? If it is the Lord then it must be wholehearted confidence that He is able to accomplish anything, that He cannot be beaten by anything or anyone. He has already proven that death could not hold His Son, Jesus Christ. He has conquered death, He has conquered sin, He has put the devil on notice that he will be sent to the place set aside for him – hell. If we trust in God as David did then we too will learn that His testimonies are worth much more than all riches, or all wealth. We live in a society where wealth is flaunted, where millionaires are easy to find because of lotteries around the world where people find instant wealth. Does it make them any happier? Certainly not! There are a number of these instant millionaires that have ended up taking their own life because they cannot cope. What David is saying is that he would much rather have the certainties of God’s promises than all the riches in the world which are but fleeting anyway. “The blessing of the LORD” we are told in Proverbs 10:22, “it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it”. It is that which comes from God which makes us rich, added to which, there is no sorrow. I know what I would rather have.

15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

“In this Psalm, delighting in the Word, loving the Word, and meditating on the Word are found together (vv. 15-16, 23-24, 47-48, 77-78, 97-99), and they should be found together in our hearts and lives. What is meditating and how can it help us as Christians? If we were to look up meditate on Google or some other web page, it would instantly take us to the numerous schools of meditation that have sprung up all over the world since the 1960s when meditation took off in the Western world. It had been a major part of Buddhist tradition for centuries but through groups such as the Beatles who went on their pilgrimages to India to “find themselves”, suddenly we found that East met West. Many Guru’s decided to export meditation to the Western World. Their form of meditation appears to be a type of self-hypnosis through the use of a mantra – the saying of the same word over and over again.

The Christian use of the word goes back to the Book of Genesis, “And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his, and saw, and behold, the camels were coming” (Genesis 24:63). The Christian definition of the word is as follows:

- loving (John 3:16; Psalm 100:5)
- kind (Genesis 24:26-27; Genesis 32:10)
- compassionate (Deuteronomy 30:1-3; 2 Kings 13:23)
- faithful (Psalm 100:4-5; Genesis 32:10)
- forgiving (Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13)
- humble (Matthew 11:28-30)
- merciful (Deuteronomy 4:31; 2 Samuel 24:14)
- holy (Leviticus 11:44-45).
“To dwell on any thing in thought; to contemplate; to study; to turn or revolve any subject in the mind; appropriately but not exclusively used of pious contemplation, or a consideration of the great truths of religion” ⁶ All preachers meditate on the Word of God as we consider what it is that God is saying to us. We do not need to get ourselves into a trance to achieve this but immerse ourselves in His Word, letting the words flow over us until we have a proper understanding.

We have, says David, a respect of God’s ways because He has made His paths clear for us to walk on. If we disregard His commandments, His statutes, His testimonies, then we must be willing to take the consequences for our actions. When the lights flash and the bell goes off at a level crossing, it is warning us of a train coming and if we choose to ignore it, we are likely to be hit by the train as it thunders through the crossing. If however we respect the ways of God, then we will be kept safe.

16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Once again David delighted himself in keeping the statutes, the laws of God engraved upon his heart. He was obedient, which Samuel said was “better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22) and he followed in a long line of Scriptural luminaries to be obedient:

- Noah (Genesis 6:22)
- Abraham (Genesis 22:2)
- Bezaleel (Exodus 36:1)
- Joshua (Joshua 11:5)
- Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:6)
- Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39)
- Paul (Acts 26:19)
- Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:8).

You will note that in these past two verses there are four actions that David declares that he does, and by implication, is saying that we should do in our lives as well:

1. I will meditate (v.15)
2. I will respect (or contemplate) (v.15)
3. I will delight (v.16)
4. I will not forget (v.16)

We must carefully treasure up God’s Holy Word because it is the way of life itself. We must declare it to others, we must meditate upon it, we must delight in it and then by the grace of Almighty God, we shall act upon it in our lives. We need to be like David who said, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2). May our reading of the Scriptures not be seen as a drudge but an absolute delight as we seek to get to know more about God day by day.
CHAPTER THREE

Gimel

17 Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

David was the King of Israel and yet he thought nothing of terming himself as God’s servant, one who was ready to obey His Master’s commands. David thought that the epithet of a servant represented a badge of honour, of dignity, and not one of servitude. He asks that He might deal bountifully with him (that is generously or plentifully with him). He knew that it was only through God’s enabling that he was able to live his life for God. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

David’s great desire was that he may live a life worthy of God and that he should keep His Word which had been imparted to him. Oh that we might have such lofty ambitions!

18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

We all need spiritual vision to be able to see God and all his hosts of heaven. In 2 Kings 6:17, Elisha prayed to God for such vision to be given to his servant and it was given to him and he was able to see the heavenly forces that were set up against the forces of the King of Syria. In Acts 7:55-56, we have the remarkable scene of Stephen just before he was stoned to death, “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God”.

Open my eyes, says David, and illuminate the wonderful revealed Word of God. We do not need to look for it any more because it is neatly bundled up in a Book entitled, the Holy Bible. We have no excuse so we must read it and ask God to reveal to us what it contains. Sunday by Sunday that is the job of the Pastor but day by day, we as Christians have a responsibility to study His Word, not just read it. Do we make use of our opportunities?

19 I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

We are all aliens, strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land. We belong not to this earth but to heaven where our Father resides in glory. It is to there we have our sight set and is to there that one day we shall go. In the meantime, we feel like William Bradford, the first Governor of the Pilgrim plantation and community in Plymouth, Massachusetts who said, “They knew that they were pilgrims and strangers here below, and looked not much on these things, but lifted their eyes up to Heaven, their dearest country, where God has prepared for them a city.”

As strangers on the earth we have need of maps and guides and SatNav’s that work and don’t send us off into a cul-de-sac or field as we journey through life. I recently
came across a story that is almost unbelievable but concerned a SatNav that took a motorist into a Ford (a shallow bit of a stream or river that you can drive through) but instead of telling him to go straight through, told him to turn left. As it was dark, he could not see what it was that he was going through and did as this machine told him to and turned left. As a consequence, he left the shallow bit of the river and went straight into a deep bit of the river and got himself stuck. Remember, God gave us an intellect to use, not machines. That is why David is asking God not to hide his commandments from him as he recognises that they are important for living life as God intends us to. We do not make it up as we go along but follow the instructions already laid down. Our eventual destination is heaven and God will take us there when the time is right. In the meantime we need help as we wander through the earthly minefields ahead.

20 My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

What David is here describing is a broken heart. Now you may have thought that such things were of legend or poetry or a Shakespeare play, but David says that this is what he is suffering from. A broken heart is a description often used to describe the intense emotional pain and suffering caused by the death of a loved one, or separation, or divorce and even rejection. I have lost both of my parents so know something of what this is about but nothing quite prepares you for the loss of a wife (in my case), a husband or indeed a child. It leaves a hole in your life that sometimes can never be filled.

David’s broken heart was not for the loss of a loved one but something equally as hurtful. It was his inability to obey every judgment that God had made. He felt that was able to keep on top of most of them and then suddenly he would stumble and the very thought sought to crush him. He knew that it was right for him to follow the path set aside by God and not the easy road laid down by the devil. It might seem easy now but it would lead us down the wrong path and to eternal destruction.

God’s Word is our survival manual for now and into the future until Jesus comes again and takes us home with Him. It supplies us with the directions for life, directions on how to understand His Word and how to put it all into practice. If we follow the path set by God we will be alright. It might be narrow but if we stick to it then we cannot go wrong and we cannot sin. We know that no matter how hard we try, we will take our eyes off the pathway but God is always there to guide us and steer us back.

21 Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.

Solomon declared, “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not go unpunished” (Proverbs 16:5), and David in Psalm 101:5 said that God will not suffer the proud. Augustine once said that, “It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels”.

In the New Testament, Jesus was often found to be criticizing the Pharisees simply because they put themselves on a pedestal as regards the keeping of the Mosaic
Law and all the additions that had been put there by themselves. As Isaiah said, “Forasmuch as these people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isaiah 29:13). The Pharisees wore a little leather box on their foreheads called a phylactery which contained verses of Scripture. They might just as well have had a flashing neon light on their head saying, “Look at me, aren’t I holy?” They forgot the Scripture which says, “for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

Do we do the same thing? I am sure we do but we probably would not recognise that we do so. How many times have we looked at a preacher we do not know as he enters the pulpit and made instant judgment on him because of the way he looks, for either good or bad? It is pride that drives us to the point of making bad judgments. The reason is to be found in the latter part of this verse, it is because we wander from His commandments.

We must all be servants (diakonos). Apart from Jesus Himself, we only need to look to Paul who did everything in a servant-like manner.

22 Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

Here David prays that God might remove the reproach and contempt of men. Even his exalted status as King of Israel was not enough to ensure that he was not libelled or did not deserve what he was being accused of. In our own day, we find that the monarchy in the United Kingdom, together with Presidents and Prime Ministers from around the world are no longer held in awe by their subjects but often in contempt, There is an old English saying that sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me, and yet they do. Our minds often churn away for hours on end at unwarranted things being said about us. Even the most hard-hearted person can be affected. This would explain another old English saying, that the pen is mightier than the sword. The sword might inflict a single cut but the pen goes on inflicting wounds the more the words are read.

The reason David gives for the reproach and contempt being wrong in this case is that “I have thy testimonies”. David had been true to God’s Word and he is declaring that this is why the world is despising him. This provides us with a valuable lesson for today. Even though we will be despised by the world and sometimes libelled by them as well, we need to keep true to God’s Holy Word. David shows the way to deal with those who would accuse him wrongly, by praying to God and not seeking judicial action in the court room.

23 Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

This takes us back to Psalm 2:2 where David says, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed”. David recognised that the occurrences of verse 22 were not just a game for the lower orders of men but also those in lofty positions, the kings and rulers of
this earth. Note what David has said though because they are taking counsel against the LORD first and then against his anointed (such as David). It is primarily an attack upon God. David was a great king and greatness brought with it envy. “Many of the lordly ones were his enemies, and made it their business to speak ill of him: they held sittings for scandal, sessions for slander, parliaments for falsehood, and yet he survived all of their attempts upon him.”

As Christians we have found the value of meditating upon God’s Word on a daily basis and here we find that David found this an effective antidote to the slings and arrows being fired at him by those who should have known better. Even better still, he rubs in the fact that they might be princes of this world as he is, but he is also a servant of the Most High first and foremost. A valuable lesson for all of us to learn.

24 Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

David gets to the nub of what he has to say in this section, that God’s testimonies are a delight to him and they are his counsellors. The princes referred to in the previous verse would have had their Privy Council much as the Queen of the United Kingdom has today made up of the good and the great to give advice. David, however, decided that he needed no human counsel but only that of God’s Word (His testimonies). Of course, there were occasions when David listened to human intervention as he did when Nathan the prophet upbraided him about his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12).

We should choose only those counsellors who will not lie to us, nor flatter us into a way of thinking, nor applaud us when we sin, but applies the truth to us at all times. The only such counsellor is God’s Word – The Bible.
25 My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

This is the great King David on one of his weak days when the woes of the world seem to be upon him. This should greatly encourage each and every one of us my friends because if David was so afflicted, then we need not be ashamed to admit that we experience such days ourselves. People in David's time and for centuries after that would cover themselves in dust and ashes when they wanted the world to know that they were full of sorrow or grieving. David had that feeling now that he was being dragged down (cleaveth) unto the dust. We have all been there but the secret is not to dwell there but to set our eyes upon higher things.

The higher things according to David were God's Word for he knew that it contained the formula for life itself. In the New Testament, we find Jesus telling the disciples, “whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matthew 10:14). What was Jesus telling us? Instead of dwelling upon the problems and letting them drag us down, we should instead shake off the dust from our feet and move on.

26 I have declared my ways, and thou hearest me: teach me thy statutes.

It is good to confess our sins to Almighty God (not to a priest masquerading as a conduit to God) AND AS David said, “thou hearest me”. A confession is not to let God know that we have sinned (He knows already) but is an acknowledgment of sins that we have committed. The “proud” people of verse 21 would never acknowledge their sins because in their eyes, they are sinless. What does the Apostle John say, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10).

Although David undoubtedly had a good understanding of God’s statutes (His laws), he asked that he might be taught more. It is good for us as well that we seek to devour the Word of God daily, dissecting it and living our discovery of it. David was the exact opposite of a proud man because he was humble. Jesus reminded us in Luke 14:11 that, “For whosoever exalteth himself (the proud man) shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). Humility in essence is putting God first in our lives.

27 Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

David was pleading for a greater and deeper understanding of God’s Word (thy precepts), something we should all be doing. It is not just the job of a Pastor to study
the Bible and teach us of what it says. It is our duty as Christians to do likewise in order that our understanding might be more than just surface deep.

The reason for David’s desire to know more is that he might “talk of thy wondrous works”. How can we speak unless we first have knowledge of what we are saying? Jesus said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). We can only speak of that which lies upon our hearts, whether good or evil. Our task is to ensure that it is good.

28 My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

When we become despondent, our heart feels extremely heavy. The weight of the whole world appears to be upon us. David knew what it was to feel burdened and depressed but he also knew how to deal with it as well. He asked that God might, “strengthen me according unto thy word”. I hope you are now getting the message that David has been leaving us over these past few verses that the answers to all of our problems are to be found in God’s Word. We need look no further, expend no extra energy in searching them out but merely turn to the Bible, seek His face and He will direct us through the Holy Spirit to the right words for our particular situation.

The picture here is the melting soul much like the constant dripping of rain water. We all know that such dripping will eventually cause damage because of the erosion caused by the dropping water. We must stop the dripping through turning our attention to God’s wonderful promises.

29 Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

It is very easy for us to say that we do not lie but the fact remains that we are sinners by birth and while as Christians we have been forgiven, we are still liable to sin until we meet Jesus in glory at the end of our lives here on earth. David is here asking God not only to remove lying from his life, but the way of lying. It is as if David was asking God for backbone to resist the seducing way of lying or sinning. The devil is cunning, that we already know, and he will use whatever means in order to put a wedge between ourselves and God. A faithless and perverse Christian is a delight to the devil. A faithful and sincere Christian is a disaster to him but a delight to God.

David as always knows the answer to his predicament. He asks that God may “grant me they law graciously”. Grace does not provide an antidote to sinning by removing it but it does help us to keep on the narrow path that leads to Almighty God. This is David recognising that it is not his way that is important but God’s way. It is His instruction that we need to crave; His law that we need to learn and all of it tinged with God’s good grace, undeserved and unmerited.
30 *I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.*

David had chosen wisely because he had chosen God instead of the devil; the truth instead of lies. It is something which each of us must do in our lives. Do not run away with the notion that lying is a minor sin and therefore does not matter. God does not deal in degrees of sinning. To Him, all sin is sin and therefore produces a barrier between the Creator and the created. God’s Word demands of us an action either positive or negative. We cannot sit on the fence, we must choose.

It was Jesus who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). This was strangely confirmed when Pilate asked the question of Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38. In Latin this is translated as quid est veritas? An anagram of this is est vir qui adest, meaning, it is the man who stands before you. Pilate would never have realised he had answered his own question mainly because it was a rhetorical one.

Before we go on a journey, we need to seriously study a map (or if we are lazy, put in the co-ordinates of where we are going into a sat-nav) and keep it with us at all times in order to know exactly where we are. So it was with David because his maps of life were God’s judgments. He had chosen the right path on which to travel and in order to feel secure, he needed to continue on that path to the end.

31 *I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.*

What a contrast with verse 25 where we saw David’s soul cleaving to the dust. Here we see him cleaving to God’s testimonies. This is our experience as well because often we find our soul (our desires) cleaving to the things of this world while our spirit cleaves to the things of God (Galatians 5:17). We need to learn to cleave to God at all times, not only when in distress, although He is always there for us. It is like a man who is drowning who finds that God has thrown him a lifeline. If we ignore it, then we will drown. If we grab hold of it, then He will save us. “It was said of Moses that he spent forty years in the wilderness learning to do nothing so that he might spend the next forty years proving God to be everything” 10

David’s plea, “O LORD, put me not to shame” may appear to be rather frivolous because God would never bring shame to His own children. David was a warrior at heart and the greatest calamity to befall a soldier is that of shame. As a soldier he did not want shame heaped upon his shoulders and as a child of God, he wanted nothing different either. Several hundreds of years later, Paul wrote, “As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33). As a believer, David need not have been concerned because God would never have brought shame upon him.

32 *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*

David here speaks not as a child in the faith but as an adult in the faith. Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). But babies must move on from milk to solids in order to continue growing and likewise as Christians must do likewise. As a man of God, his desire
was no longer to walk, but to run the way of God’s commandments. We all learn to walk first and to run second. It is a natural progression. To enable him to do so, he desires God to provide him with an enlarged heart. All the top athletes have bigger hearts than the rest of us, but a slower heart rate. A man of compassion is said to have a big heart and so must we.

The life of a Christian is not a stroll in the park as some seem to think, but is a constant race to bring the gospel message to unbelievers. Ours thankfully is not the task of conversion; that belongs to the Holy Spirit, but bringing God’s Word to those who need to hear it most certainly is our job. We need to be fit to do the job that God has called us to do and so we, like David, need to beseech God for an enlarged heart in order that, “they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).
CHAPTER FIVE

He

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

This should be the attitude of all Christians that God would teach us the way of His Word; His laws. It puts us into a position of humility because we readily acknowledge that we do not know everything, indeed our knowledge is as a drop in the ocean compared with God’s infinite and all-encompassing knowledge. We learn by reading and studying the Word of God, by listening to the Holy Spirit’s promptings, by listening and adhering to what God’s ordained Pastors have to say to us. We, of course, must discern the truth by comparing Scripture with Scripture. False teachers will always stray from Scripture and we must be careful not to follow them, no matter how nice they may appear. The object of being taught by God His own statutes is that “I shall keep it to the end”, or I can persevere; hold fast; hold true; hold steady to the end.

34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.

This verse is a parallel of the preceding one because having previously asked God to teach him, David is now asking that he is given understanding of what he has been taught. It represents knowledge in verse 33 and understanding in verse 34 and the two should always go together. Knowledge without understanding is of no value because we have head knowledge without the corresponding heart knowledge. This is immensely important because we want to be able to understand God’s Word, not because it gives us a better standing in the Church, or we are perceived as theologians, but that we might become obedient to His laws (Proverbs 2). By being obedient, we will change direction in our lives for the better. Indeed David goes on to say that, “I shall observe it with my whole heart”. It is because God’s teaching and our obedience to that teaching turns us into authentic Christians, those who are well-rounded and able to be of service to God, that we seek to know more. We learn not for ourselves and what we can get out of it but what we can give back to God. That is why we sing:

Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus,

To reach out and touch Him and say that we love Him,

Open our ears Lord and help us to listen,

Open our eyes Lord, we want to see Jesus.

It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin and to take the scales from our eyes in order that we can see Jesus in all His glory and majesty,
35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

Our natural inclination is not toward our Lord but towards evil because we were born into sin. David here pleads to God to make him walk “in the paths of your commandments” because as he says himself at the end of the verse, “for therein do I delight”. It may not be our natural inclination but we recognise when something is good for us. Note that David asks that he may walk in the path, not the road, not the highway, but the narrow path that leads to God and His righteousness. A path is a trail that is narrow and can only be accessed on foot. Only a fool would take such a path when he had the option of using a road but then as Christians, we are fools for Christ’s sake (1 Corinthians 4:10). As such we are able to walk the narrow path with certainty because we see with His sight.

36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

This whole section has to do with David asking God to do certain things in his life that will push him towards God. In verse 33 he wanted to be taught, in verse 34 he wanted understanding, in verse 35 he wanted to walk in the narrow path and here in verse 36 he wants his heart to be inclined to God’s testimonies and not to covetousness. “To understand the Bible I need a heart that is turned towards doing God’s testimonies with my feet, my lips, my wallet and my hands” 9. We need to turn for ourselves to God with His help. David wants to lean towards the Bible and not to covetousness. This is an extraordinary word describing an extraordinary desire for the possessions of others or an insatiable desire for wealth. This is the way of the world where what we own is what we are. As Christians we are to “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Vanity is defined as “that which is empty of meaning, purpose or content” 10. Solomon, writing in the Book of Ecclesiastes bemoaned the fact that in his eyes, “all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Throughout the book he wrote of the meaningless of all that was around him and yet his final conclusion in Chapter 12:13 was, “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for therein is the whole duty of man”. David didn’t even want to look upon vanity as he probably knew how easy it would be for his head to be turned away from God. This should be the same for us as well. It is very easy for Christians to think that they are strong enough to resist the wiles of the devil but never underestimate him for after all, he managed to seduce many of his fellow angels into his way of thinking and they and they had been in the presence of God. We just have to bear in mind that as the lyricist wrote, we must:

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,
That the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace”

If we look upon vanity as sin and sin as vanity then we cannot go wrong.

David seeks a quickening in God’s way, in other words, that God may make His way so alive in him that he will have no need to seek anything else. He recognises that by himself, he is unable to do such a thing but he knows someone who can do it for him, and that is God.

38 Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

What David is here saying is in effect, hold up your Word before my eyes so that I will always be reminded of your promises. God’s Word meant a great deal to David as it should to us as well. He attempted to live by it often failing as we do but that never stopped him trying. He knew his own frailties all too well and was desirous of God’s help and understanding in overcoming them. David then goes on to say that he was “devoted to thy fear” which seems a very odd thing to say but actually means that he was in awe of God, a word that has been greatly misused and abused in this day and age when youngsters refer to almost everything as “awesome” while actually meaning they like something. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 9:10 that, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”. He recognised as did David that holy fear is not something we should be afraid of but something we should seek to obtain.

39 Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

David feared one thing above all others and that was to bring dishonour on God’s holy name. With his predecessor as King of Israel, we find the opposite to be true. In Samuel 15:30 we find Saul praying to God, “I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel”. Saul was only interested in his own reputation. Contrast that with David’s approach in 2 Samuel 12:13, “I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die”. David states unequivocally that God’s judgments are good which by implication means that man’s judgments without God’s intervention are bad. He approves God’s judgments because they are always tinged with mercy while man’s judgments he dreads because they seek to destroy.

40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

Only one who is a follower of the Almighty can truly say, as did David, that he longs after His precepts. He longs to follow God’s commands, His instructions because he knows that it the only way forward. This puts God in the correct place in our lives as the leader, the One to follow in all circumstances because He has proven Himself over the centuries and millennia. We know that we can grow as Christians as we devour the Word of God (1 Peter 2:1-3) so why do we often back away from consuming it with gusto? David not only seeks God’s commands to follow but recognises the need for God’s righteousness as well. We hear all too often of people who will trumpet what they consider to be their justification in life – the deeds
they have done which they believe God should take account of when He comes to judge us. As Paul writes in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one”. This is confirmed by the prophet Isaiah who wrote in Isaiah 64:6 that, “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”. There is nothing we can do to merit God’s favour. We need to rely on God’s mercy and grace alone. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man will boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).
CHAPTER SIX

Vau

41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.

It has taken 41 verses for love to be mentioned but it is instantly linked with salvation because it came about through God’s love for us. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God’s love for us was so great that He allowed His only Son, Jesus Christ to come to earth as a human being, suffer and die on the Cross at Calvary and rise from the grave on the third day in order that our sins might be forgiven and that we might be granted salvation. Our greatest need as humans is God’s salvation which just happens to be God’s greatest gift to mankind.

42 So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

When we receive salvation from God we are granted redemption from sin, redemption from eternal death (the consequence of unforgiven sin) and redemption from hell (the place where we would have gone had our sins not been forgiven). Instead we have been pardoned by God because all sin is against His commands. We have been granted peace within our souls because it is sin that produces rage within us and we have been accepted by God. Sin is an impenetrable barrier for us as humans that stop us approaching God directly. It was only through Christ’s death on the Cross that the barrier was removed permanently. So David is here saying that because of his salvation, he is able to answer all those who seek to reproach him, “the objections of the infidel, the quibbles of the sceptical and the sneers of the contemptuous” 12, because he trusts in God’s Word.

43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.

How often have we as Christians lost precious opportunities to speak of God’s goodness to us because of fear of what someone might say? The same can sometimes be said of preachers who for the want of a better phrase, “bottle it” when they enter the pulpit, fearing to lay bare the sins of their congregation. At the Diet of Worms held on 18 April 1521, Martin Luther was answering charges of heresies in his writings. He responded by saying, “I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen” 13. Luther stood firm. He had kept the word of truth in his mouth and thus started the Reformation. By so doing, the judgment of the Lord would be most favourable to him. As David had previously said, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).
44 So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.

David’s intention was to keep God’s law for the remainder of his earthly lifetime. It is the grace of God that sustained David, knowing that He is there beside him every step of the way and as long as he is able to keep his eyes fixed firmly on Him, he knows that he can endure to the end. Words are cheap! If we want people to take us seriously in our Christian faith then our words must be followed by action. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). It is faith that that is required and David has that in abundance. “Faith that the keeping power of God is greater than his own stumbling uncertainty, his wandering, his deviation from the way; faith that the love of God is greater than his human wretchedness, his anguished pain; faith that the mind of God is greater than his most irrational fears. Faith that he cannot go beyond the grace of God” 14

45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

How can a man walk at liberty when he is in effect subjecting himself to the will of someone else? Quite easily! It is precisely because he is seeking the precepts of God that he becomes free from the anxieties and cares of the world, free from satan’s constant finger pointing about not following God’s commands. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free” (John 8:32). “Being then made free from sin, ye become the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:18).

46 I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

David’s desire to do that which is right before the Lord is highly laudable. Not only will he seek to keep the law (v.44) and to walk in it (v.45), he also seeks to speak to others of his faith as well. His great desire is that he will be able to speak to his fellow monarchs about the greatest King of all, the Lord God Almighty, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He recognised that he had in his possession something that was of extreme value and he could not keep quiet about it. It was certainly not something that he felt he could, or indeed should keep quiet about because it affected the individual futures of those round about him. Most of us in such a situation would find it very difficult to stand firm but John Knox, the great Scottish Reformer stood before Mary Queen of Scots and told her, “Ye shall believe God, that plainly speaketh in His Word; and further than the Word teacheth you, ye shall believe neither the one nor the other. The Word of God is plain in itself. If there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, which is never contrarious to Himself, explaineth the same more clearly in other places; so that there can remain no doubt, but unto such as obstinately will remain ignorant“. O that God will grant us such words to speak at the appropriate moment. 15

47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

Do you delight in God’s Word so much that you could say you loved it with a passion? That in essence was what David was saying here. It was his love for God’s commands that drove him to keep the law, walk at liberty and to testify before Kings of its content. It was very easy to see that David led an organised life but for
most of us, our lives are probably described as haphazard at best and totally disorganised at worst. We fit God around us rather than the other way round. For David this would never be the way he lived. He declared in Psalm 5:3, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD, in the morning will I direct my prayers unto thee, and will look up”. His insistence was to start each day with prayer to God. A lesson we need to learn, because Jesus Himself set us the same example. “And in the morning, rising up a good while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). The secret of a victorious life with God is one of prayer and a study of His Word.

48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

As a Christian, when we lift up our hands in worship we do so to acknowledge the One who means the most to us. Whilst Charismatic’s and Pentecostals do so on a regular basis, other Christians lift up their eyes towards heaven or inwardly point themselves heavenward. When a child is learning to walk, he/she will hold out their hands towards the one who is seeking to guide them. Likewise as Christians, we hold out our hands as well to God who seeks to guide us through the wary pathways here on earth. It is for us to grasp His hand, to hold on tight and never be ashamed to admit our need for Him no matter how old we may be. His commandments are a delight to us, we do love them and we should and indeed must learn to meditate upon them.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Zain

49 Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

David is not here reminding God of what He has already said as if He has forgotten it but it is asking Him to act on the promises He has already made. It is good for us to remember that it is God’s Word to us that is important. What we say or do is of no import to God but His Word is inviolable. It will always come to pass. Many Christians are able to hang on to Scriptures that have been given to them in times of trial. It gives us hope because God has told us that it will be alright. Here David clings on to hope (the certainty) that God has given to him. We do not put our hope in human beings or their schemes but in Almighty God who has proved Himself time and time again.

“My hope is built on nothing less.
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name
On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.” 16

50 This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

The rich young man who came to Jesus thought that by keeping God’s commandments was the answer to his every need. When Jesus tested his true character by telling him to sell all of his possessions and give the money to the many poor around him, he failed because his wealth was what made his character. There is nothing wrong with wealth but how much of our lives does it take over. I know one or two wealthy Christians who use the money that God has given them to promote Christ. It appears that the more they do for God, the more their businesses grow and the more they have available for promoting Christianity. Our verse looks at a different kind of wealth but one that is easily attainable by us all and that is the Word of God. David tells us that it is God’s Word that comforts him when he is afflicted. It doesn’t matter what the afflictions are, whether spiritual or physical, God’s Word is always sufficient to deal with the situation.

51 The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

We will all receive trials during our lives. As Christians we have been told often enough about not expecting our lives to be a bed of roses because we have in effect
put a notice around our necks indicating our desire to follow Jesus and this appears to be an open invitation to all to see if they can knock us off our perch. Such actions do not have to be violent although we are all aware of the many Christians who are persecuted around the world daily. It is an odd but a wonderful place to be a Christian where one person will respect our position and may moderate his/her language accordingly while another will see it as a red flag to a bull and charge ahead intent on knocking us down. David talks of proud men, that is conceited individuals who will always argue with you on the basis that they know they are right. Such people will take aim and seek to land a punch but there are those like David who did not take his eyes off the law of God. It is a precious instrument that it behoves us all to follow its precepts. There is a saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me”. Psychologists will tell us that the person who uses such tactics is actually a weak person trying to become powerful (even though temporarily) by getting you to react to name calling. David’s answer to those who called him names was to go to God’s law that reminded him that he was a person saved by God’s good grace.

52 I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.

God’s judgments are always good so it is very apt that we look back on them frequently to remind ourselves of the actions that were perpetrated against His people and what He did to remedy the situation. It was George Santayana who said, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”. It has spawned many famous paraphrases. What it is really saying is that those who do not read history are doomed to repeat what happened before because they do not know the consequences of their actions. That is why I feel so strongly that in the United Kingdom it is a sad day when history is mostly not taught in schools any more. For us as Christians, we have our Bibles which is God’s history book. It is therefore vital that we take the opportunity to read and understand what God has done throughout earthly history and use it as a comfort when we find ourselves under attack. Remember what Jesus said in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”. These are words of comfort; these are words of hope and encouragement.

53 Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

It is interesting to see the tender reaction of David to those who are doomed to receive God’s judgment. He knows how awful it will be and he is horrified at the very thought of it. Words cannot describe the anguish of those who will be judged because of their crime against God. We who by God’s grace have been saved cannot simply be smug about it but will feel the pain that so many are needlessly perishing because they have failed to see the goodness and graciousness of Jesus Christ who died for them on the Cross at Calvary. Those who forsake the law will die by the law but we should hold no comfort in that but use it to redouble our efforts to take the gospel message of salvation and hope to them.
54 Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

We often sing when we are happy but how many of us feel like singing when we are distressed? This was what Paul and Silas did after they had been beaten in prison (Acts 16:25). This goes to show that people can brutalise us as much as they want but cannot knock the heart out of our lives. For a Christian, God is everything and it is what is in our heart that is important. We, like David are merely pilgrims in this world in which we currently reside. We are seeking a better country where all people will glorify God and one day we will get there. That is our hope; that is what keeps us going. It is not a vain hope but a certain hope. Until we get there we are able to sing of His wondrous deeds.

55 I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.

David here reminds us that Christianity is not just for Sundays but for every day of the week and for every hour of every day. Likewise we do not make a show of keeping God’s law only on a Sunday in order to impress the neighbours but do so at all times. As a Christian, we are under permanent scrutiny from those who would seek to find fault with our lives. Be on your guard! Ours is not a part-time religion but one that requires our full attention at all times. Keep your eyes upon Jesus and we won’t go far wrong.

56 This I had, because I kept thy precepts.

David here reminds us that we have been given hope; we have been granted comfort; we are able to uphold His law and we are able to sing lustily, all because we keep God’s precepts. It is our desire to live consistent, God fulfilling lives and it brings its own reward. We are granted God’s good grace. It was Jesus who said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is through our weakness that God is glorified. We live in a world that seeks to build up the individual that makes stars out of everyone. With God, He alone is the star to whom we pay due homage.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Cheth

57 **Thou art my portion, O LORD: I have said that I would keep thy words.**

Sometimes we can look everywhere for the answers to situations we might find ourselves in and yet we miss the obvious one which is staring us in the face. It is God Himself who is our answer for all occasions. That is what David is here saying. You are my portion O LORD; You are everything to me; You are the answer to all my prayers; and that is why I have said I will keep Your words.

58 **I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.**

God knows our every desire before we do but He wants us to ask Him for them. David acknowledges this by telling us that it is with his whole heart that he asks God. It is not a throwaway line but something that flows through him. The thing that caused David such anguish is his need, his absolute need for God’s mercy. He knows that he is a sinner, destined for hell and yet mindful of God’s promise that, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). God is always faithful to His promises and that is why David refers back to His Word. You have promised O LORD to give me mercy and I am pleading for it now to cover my sins. Our God will never let us down because He is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

59 **I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.**

David used God’s Word as the benchmark for his own life and came up considerably short. His answer was that he turned his feet, that is his whole body, towards the Scriptures, intent upon keeping them all his days. It wasn’t a backward glance but a definite movement towards God’s Word because it contains all the answers we will ever need for living a holy life, worthy of being presented at the feet of our Saviour. “Action without thought is folly, and thought without action is sloth: to think carefully and then to act promptly is a happy contribution” 18

60 **I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.**

David didn’t delay but made haste, such was his excitement at what he had discovered. We have probably all been in a similar situation when we can’t wait to tell someone else of what we have found during our searches. David’s answer was to hurry to keep God’s commandments because they brought him closer to the Creator of the Universe. David had been the recipient of God’s mercy and he was eager to keep his ways.

61 **The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.**

As a Christian it is vital that we are always on guard because the enemy does not sleep and is forever checking our defences and whenever they find a chink in our
armour, they will pounce and seek to rob us of our inheritance with God. This may well have been a reference to King Saul who sought to destroy David but one thing was for certain, David had not forgotten God’s laws. It had been part of his make-up as it should be ours as well. He could reflect upon God’s law, he could remember it and most importantly of all, he could remember the true power of God that was able to defeat all his enemies.

62 At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.

For some of us, the very thought of getting up at midnight is simply ludicrous because we wouldn’t have actually gone to bed but to David it had great meaning. Being one who was brought up as a shepherd, he would have got used to going to bed when it was dark and getting up when it was light. So to David, it took effort to get up at midnight and give thanks to Almighty God but he did it, not out of a sense of compulsion or of duty, but because he delighted in it. At that time there would have been nothing of the hustle and bustle of daytime around him and he could concentrate on God alone. The cause of David getting up was to give thanks for His righteous judgments which for some meant the providence of delivering the godly from their sins and for others would mean the punishment of the wicked.

63 I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

During the night he prayed to God but during the day he kept company with all those that fear Him. Not a select few but all! Some might well say that he wasn’t very choosy. I would argue that he was very choosy because he chose only those who fear God and kept His precepts. To put it another way, lambs do not make friends with wolves and doves do not make friends with hawks. Yet perversely we see that Jesus hung out not only with His disciples but with Publicans and sinners – the very worst type of society according to the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus kept such company in order to call them to repentance and faith in Him. Matthew after all was a Publican (a tax gatherer), a most despised person, even in today’s world! Jesus had been tempted by Satan himself and did not waiver so his minions held no alarm for Him. However, Christian beware! Many a Christian has thought of emulating Jesus in this respect but one thing that he/she lacks is His holiness and His perfection.

64 The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes.

You will never be taught this in a geography lesson. The earth is full of God’s mercy. As someone who was in exile, he had travelled across vast swathes of land, met many different people and yet as he looked, he could see God’s mercy everywhere. So David prayed that God may teach him His statutes. Is David looking through rose coloured spectacles at the earth around him? No! He is looking as one who has been taught by God to see His majesty, His goodness, His grace wherever his eyes could behold. When the communists decreed that Christianity had been crushed in China and Russia, how many Christian leaders actually believed them. The reality was that far from being crushed, Christianity had grown and grown under the many
sorrows and privations of communism to the glory of God. David was able to see all that God had made, all of God's statutes, and laws, and commandments in action wherever he was. We thank you, O God, as did David before us, for all your bountiful mercies around us.
CHAPTER NINE

Teth

65 Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word.

David is here reflecting upon his life to date and tells us that God has dealt with him according to His Word. When we look back over our own lives, are we able to say the same thing. After all, we have gone through periods of trial and testing; periods of prosperity and adversity; periods of sickness and health and yet if we are honest, we will say as did David that He has dealt with us kindly as well. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

David prays for good judgment and knowledge. How else would David know what was the will of God unless he has been taught? It is often our judgment that is lacking when we sin. We weigh up the evidence and fall on one side or the other and when we discover that we have sinned, we realise that we misdirected ourselves in the first place unless it was wilful sin. That is why David is asking for knowledge because without it, how can he possibly weigh up the pros and cons of any argument; how can he possibly know what is right and what is wrong? I am always concerned about churches where the sermon is not central to any service, where so-called worship (i.e. singing) is the largest part of any time we spend with God. Why, oh why do we have to spend so much time singing the same songs over and over again as if God didn’t hear us the first time? All parts of the service are “worship” because they all lead our thoughts toward God but we will generally only learn through God’s servant as he delivers what has been laid upon his heart for the congregation. Having good judgment means that we are able to discriminate between truth and error; a very important job for a Christian. Our job is to follow the example of Jesus, in other words, follow the truth. Oh that we may hold good judgment and knowledge in such high esteem in our lives.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

David speaks here of going astray from the Word of God, in other words, sinning. It is something we all do and we need at times to reflect upon the state we were in before God intervened. David does not talk of wilfully sinning but of doing so through ignorance. We often hear of the maxim that ignorance of the law is no excuse and the same thing applies to spiritual law as well. God laid down in the Ten Commandments His law for all time and He means us to keep them. God wants us all to be conversant with His law, His Word and that is why He gave us the Bible, not so that it can gather dust from Monday to Saturday, being picked up on Sunday to show what good Christians we are. He meant us to use His Word as our daily study, to see what it is that He wants us to do in every situation and if it is not explicitly stated, to use its principle to see the way forward. David was once inattentive to
God’s Word but now as he says, he keeps it. “By affliction God separates the sin which He hates from the soul which He loves.”

68 Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

David declares what appears to be an undeniable statement that God is good and does good. Indeed goodness is one of God’s attributes that is as much a part of Him as breath is to a human being. Yet we often hear, especially at the funerals of non-believers of those who apparently spent their lives doing good. But John said, there is none good but one, and that is God (Matthew 19:16-17). We are essentially lovers of ourselves through vanity and pride and will never live up to God’s standards (2 Timothy 3:2-3). That does not mean that we do not try but God alone has goodness as a moral quality. David’s answer as always was to lean upon God and His Word and wanted Him to teach him. A Christian is a perpetual student and David personifies this.

69 The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). We must never forget who it is we are fighting against. It is Satan and his minions who seek our destruction. In verse 51 they tried to deride him; in verse 61 they tried to defraud him; now in verse 69 they are trying to defame him. Why should a non-Christian seek to defame a Christian? For one reason only and that is to put a halt to his effectiveness in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen an upsurge in militant atheists in recent years whose one desire is the abolition of Christianity. I suspect that the core of evangelical Christianity has been rather good at telling the truth of Christ crucified and this is their response. David’s answer, as ours should be, is a declaration that he will keep God’s precepts with all his heart. In other words, he will move heaven and earth to ensure that he does his utmost to obey God’s Word.

70 Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.

David’s description of non-Christians here is superb, describing their hearts as fat as grease. We have all seen lean meat and we have seen fatty meat and I believe that most people would prefer the lean version. The original words are best translated as making a person stupid and doltish. A fat heart leads to degeneration and ultimately death while a heart of a Christian is one which is lean, hungry and rejoices in God’s Word and leads to spiritual life. It is in other words, a regenerated heart. As a consequence David delights in God’s law and seeks to keep it.

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

David was looking at the positive side of life, from the “my glass is half full” camp. He has decided that affliction had done him good because it forced him to look at himself, his own life and do something about it. For David it was all about keeping God’s law, His statutes, and he learned them not from reading about them in God’s
Word but by experience. It is one thing knowing what God wants us to do; it is another altogether to get on and do it.

72 The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

David speaks as if God had just uttered His Words and that is how we are always to look upon them. They may have been first uttered thousands of years ago but we are to treat them as if they have just been said by God. There is always a freshness about God’s Word and we need to heed it. After all, it was God’s mouth that spoke into existence all of creation and that includes us. It was God’s mouth that spoke forth judgments upon so many people over the millennia and the same mouth that spoke forth mercy to us who have been redeemed by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For David, he prized God’s law greater than gold or silver as did the Apostle Peter when the lame man asked him for alms. He said, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee; in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). It was not silver or gold that the lame man truly needed but the healing touch of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where does silver and gold fit into our lives?
CHAPTER TEN

Jod

73 Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

David recognises God as the great Creator of all things, but especially man. Not only did God create man but He also formed (fashioned) him. He was the Potter and we are merely the clay who waits to be formed into the finished article (Romans 9:21) by the One whose hands are upon us. It puts creation into perspective that not only are we made from the dust of the ground by an Almighty God but it took His hands to form us into the shape we are today. It was nothing to do with us but everything to do with God and His eternal purpose. So David recognising God’s supremacy in creation asks Him to grant him understanding for one purpose only and that is to learn His commandments. What David was seeking was spiritual judgment that he may know what comes from God and what does not, something that appears to be sadly lacking in so many denominations today who are seeking after spiritual experiences rather than God. Let us seek for discernment.

74 They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

Like-minded people will rejoice together and they will be able to help each other in adversity. In Galatians 6:2 we are told, “Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ”. If we see a fellow Christian suffering, we are not to leave him/her be but to try and relieve them of the sins that they are struggling with. That is why Paul tells us later on in the same chapter, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). In Romans 12:15 we are told, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”. As one who has counselled many over the years I have had to both rejoice and weep at what I was being told. It is a heartless thing to do to sit in judgment upon a fellow human being and show no empathy. In the shortest verse in the Bible (John 11:35), Jesus showed His empathy for Lazarus who had died; He wept. If Jesus, the pure, sinless Son of God can weep when He knows all is not lost then we can show empathy for others. The reason given by David is that he had hoped in God’s Word. Hope is confidence born of faith and faith is a gift of God. It is a wonderful thing that Christians are able to cope with their sinful past because of their hope in a future when Christ reigns supreme and we live in peace with Him.

75 I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

What a moment it is when we are able to say as David does that he knows God’s judgments are right. How did he come to that conclusion? Because he had been taught and experienced for himself, God in action. We cannot read the Bible without seeing God's judgments and that is why so many people assume God to be cruel and harsh and yet it is because he loves us all that He must deal with sin through judgment. Remember, if it was not for the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the
Cross at Calvary, that we would all be subject to the harsh but fair judgment of God. On the Day of Judgment we will all stand before Him. To some of us we will hear these words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21) whilst for others it will be the words of eternal doom, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that worketh iniquity” (Matthew 7:23). David acknowledged that God had been faithful in afflicting him, but faithful to who or what? God had been faithful to Himself in that He detests sin and it must be dealt with.

76 Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.

In the previous verse, David acknowledged that God's judgments are right and that he had been afflicted accordingly. Here he asks that God in looking upon him may grant merciful kindness. Even the strongest Christian is weak and this is freely acknowledged. The important thing to remember is that he asks God in accordance with His Word. He is not asking for something that is outside the remit of Scripture. As a child who hurts himself seeks comfort from his mother's arms, so a Christian seeks comfort from our heavenly Father.

77 Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

Once again David is seeking mercy from God but for a different reason than before. He first sought mercy to forgive his sins; then he sought mercy to comfort him and now he seeks mercy to live and sin no more. The words “tender mercy” give us a sense of the soothing balm that God provides us. Whatever else we may wish to say about David, we can certainly say that he loved God's Word; he loved God's law for he found it a great delight.

78 Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

We will always find proud people wherever we look, indeed in some cases, they treat pride almost as a badge of honour. However, God had other things to say about this heinous sin. In Proverbs 11:2 we are told, "When pride cometh, then cometh shame; but with the lowly is wisdom". In Proverbs 16:18 we are told, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall”. Perhaps the best example we find in Scripture can be seen in Luke 16:10-14 looking at the difference in attitude between a Pharisee and a Publican. The Pharisee prayed to God saying, “I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess”. The Publican on the other hand would not even lift his eyes toward heaven but smote his breast and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner”. The Pharisee was the type of person that David was referring to, the hypocritical leaders who apparently do everything right but whose heart is not with God. Set that against the Publican who was so ashamed of his sinful life that he couldn’t even look God in the face but freely acknowledged his sinfulness. David’s answer as always is to meditate upon the Scriptures because he knows that they contain the words of life that we all need so much.
79 Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

The job of anyone who is in a Christian ministry of any kind is to turn the eyes of the heathen (those who do not know God) towards God and not towards themselves. I can sadly remember one minister I worked with who built up a tremendous following and when he fell through an affair and had to leave the Church, half the congregation left at the same time. Their hearts were with the minister and not with God. They came week by week to hear the minister and not to hear God. David is not here asking for an adulatory audience but seeking to lead all like-minded people heavenwards. All those that fear You; all those that seek Your face day after day and will devour Your words, these people I wish to lead.

80 Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.

We all wish to be sound in what we believe; that we will not waiver when we are confronted; that we will stand firm even when the earthquake of human opposition hits us. The implication from the Word of God is to be perfect, to be holy. In other words, our beliefs are God-like or driven by Him who laid them down in His Word. “Beloved, if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God” (1 John 3:21). We will all be tried and tested before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. May we all be found to be true and sound in our beliefs.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Caph

81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

So strong was David’s desire for salvation that it made him want to faint. It made him want to prostrate himself before Almighty God as a mark of respect and as an act of contrition for his sins. His great hope was built on the eternal promise of God and he never let that out of his sight. That is why he was able to say that he hopes in God’s Word because it had never failed him and never would and likewise, if we put our trust in what God has said, we will never be disappointed either. May our faith be as strong as that of David.

82 Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

Having God’s Word to read was the next best thing to having God beside him. He read it so much that his eyes were failing. When, if ever, have we been able to say something similar? Do we esteem God’s Word as did David or is it something we read when we have nothing else to do? I sometimes find myself looking out of my window for someone I am expecting and if they are late for any reason, I become unsettled until I am able to see them with my own eyes. David was wrestling with something similar except what he was looking for was God’s comfort. For David it wasn’t a matter of just looking for comfort; his desire and his hope could only be assuaged by God’s comfort.

83 For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

This is a fascinating allusion to a bottle in the smoke. It is referring not to glass bottles for they did not exist then but to the wine skins. When they were empty they would be hung up in the tent and the smoke from the fire would blacken them, dry them out and eventually crack them. David was likening himself to this whole process so much that not only was his face furrowed through drying out, but his whole being was drying out and becoming useless. Yet for all this, he goes on to say that he will never forget God’s statutes. At this point in his life, David was about as low as he could get and yet he never forgot his God.

84 How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

How long O Lord! How often has this been our cry from the heart. This cry is no stranger to the Scriptures either for we find it being uttered by David in Psalm 79:5; by Isaiah (6:11); by Habakuk (1:2) and by Zechariah (1:12). All of these mighty men of God have struggled with opposition and their hearts cried out to God for respite and to seek revenge on those who had been persecuting them. David knew that God would act but he was getting impatient. He did not like to see them prosper through their iniquities but yet God would act and perhaps not in a way we would expect. Paul met with God on the road to Damascus in a most dramatic fashion. This one-time persecutor of the Church became its greatest evangelist in the same
way as Nicky Cruz, a gang leader and murderer met with God and became one of Christianity’s greatest proponents instead of opponents. The message here is simple. Trust in the Lord and He will make everything alright in His time and not ours.

85 The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.

David here talks about a hunting metaphor. Hunters would dig pits to ensnare wild animals and they were very carefully concealed so that it was all but impossible to know of their presence until we fall into one. The secret of the hunters was to lead their prey towards the concealed pit and let them fall in of their own volition. As Christians we need to be alert to the dangers of the world because there are many traps out there ready to consume us so be wary of where we are being led and keep to the narrow path that leads to salvation. I have read in times past of those who feel that they are safe working in seedy parts of the neighbourhood by themselves because God will protect them. They can so easily fall foul of the traps laid out for them. We need to be worldly wise in order to evade such traps. How many ministers of God’s Word have fallen because they failed to see the traps that are all around them. Many have fallen in adultery because they didn’t take the simple precaution of never seeing women in a counselling situation alone or at least in their office with their secretary outside. We need to carefully consider our position every time and not leave it to chance.

86 All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.

These statements from David sum up what this section is all about and just where David stands. He firstly acknowledges the faithfulness of God’s commandments; not some of them but all of them. Next he puts the blame for all his woes on the right people, his persecutors. Lastly, he seeks God’s assistance in three wonderful words, “help thou me”. It begins with a golden statement and ends in a golden prayer. David was doing what we are told in the New Testament to do. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 we are told to, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”. David has proven over the years that God’s Word was true and he would hold it dear to his heart. David had also tested the spirits (1 John 4:1) to know that those who persecuted him were not of God but of Satan and their intentions were therefore evil. Lastly, he knew to whom he should ask for help because in Psalm 121:1-2 he said, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth”. After all, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:35-37). May we be able to think straight when we find ourselves under persecution and stand firm in our conviction.
87 They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

Those who seek to persecute us will continue to do so until such time as they believe we have been thoroughly beaten, destroyed, humiliated; but God has other designs on our lives. It reminds me of one of my favourite hymns, “It is well with my soul”.

“Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,

Let this blest assurance control

That Christ has regarded my helpless estate

And hath shed his own blood for my soul.

It is well, with my soul

It is well, it is well with my soul” 20

The answer for David and for us is always to look at what God has already said in His Word and He will never let us down.

88 Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.

David finishes this section with another plea to God to quicken him, that is to preserve him or give him life in order that he can continue to keep God’s testimonies. In days of old they had a saying, dum spiro spero, which means, while I breathe I hope but David expected to be blessed by God because of his faithfulness and so would have exclaimed instead, dum, expiro, spero, meaning even while I expire, I hope. With David, nothing could separate him from God’s love. It could so easily have been David who wrote the words of Paul in Romans 8:38-39, “For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. The effects of Satan and his minions are futile and yet they will continue to try and knock us off course but so long as we keep God’s testimony, we are safe.
89 For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.

Having been tossed hither and thither on the sea of despair, David is at last able to plant his feet firmly upon the rock of God’s Word on dry land. It settled David’s thoughts in heaven where they belonged and when we become settled in our Christian lives, it shows a maturity, a sense of holiness that we all need to strive for. Holiness may sound like something which we will never attain but merely means becoming more Christ like and that is something which we all strive for and will attain in glory. In other words, once God declared His Word, it is unchangeable and stands firm in heaven as a beacon to all believers. To those who hope that God will somehow change His mind and accept all people into heaven, this stands as a reminder that their hopes will be dashed.

90 Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

God is faithful to all generations because:

a. God is faithful: “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

b. Time means nothing to God: “But beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8).

God’s promises are always true. Ask any Christian and they will tell you time and time again when God has kept His promises. Unlike us humans, He will never tire of the work He does on our behalf because He never sleeps. We have that blessed assurance that “He is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). God created the earth (He established it) and it is still here and will remain here for as long as He wills it. We have that surety and it provides us with stability.

91 They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

The words here refer to the previous verse in which it talks of the earth and all the generations of mankind. God not only created all things but he also sustains all things as well. It gives us a wonderful glow inside to realise that God really does direct our paths but that it is just us who also often refuse to listen to His guidance. We are, as David says, all His servants and yet we have the temerity at times to assume it is the other way round as we bombard God with prayer demands, not prayer requests. If we add to this the enduring power of God’s Word in verse 89 that lasts forever, we have the perfect setting. Many people have tried to destroy God’s Word but no one has ever, or will ever succeed. It is now allowed in to almost every
country on earth and what set the Reformation alight was the ability of ordinary men
and women being able to read the Bible in their own tongue.

92 Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine
affliction.

When we are troubled it is good to be able to find comfort and nothing comforted
David like God’s Word. He was able to reach for it knowing its value, knowing its
promises which were ever true. Jeremiah also knew the value of His Word, “Then
the LORD out forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me,
Behold I have put my words in thy mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9). Paul writing to the Church
at Thessalonica said, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because,
when ye received the word of God, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is
in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1
Thessalonians 2:13). We do not need to worry about the cares of the world when we
have God on our side because as David said, he would otherwise have perished
under the weight of them all. “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life,
what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.
Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the
air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly
Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matthew 6:25-26). The ups
and downs of normal human existence are better dealt with by the certainty of God,
the One who will never change.

93 I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

How many people are able to say as David did that he will never forget God’s
precepts? To those brought up in a Sunday School environment from an early age,
are often able to recite large chunks of Scripture later on in life even if we have never
been back to Church. I well remember reading the life story of Georgi Vins, a
Russian Baptist Pastor who was terribly persecuted by the Russian authorities for his
faith. While imprisoned and without his Bible, he was able to bring back to memory,
large portions of Scripture that he had learned in the days when owning a Bible was
well nigh impossible and one was loaned around the whole Church. It helped him to
keep his sanity during those dark days of torture. He had engraven these portions of
Scripture onto his mind and was able to bring them back to the surface when he
needed them most. For a Christian, how much more valuable it is to remember
these things no matter what the circumstance. God will always bring them to
remembrance at the appropriate time.

94 I am thine, save me: for I have sought thy precepts.

“I am thine” says David, literally, I belong to you. It is Covenant faithfulness in action
because he goes on to say, “save me”. Note that he does not say, save me and I
will be yours but puts it the right way round. Because we belong to Jesus, we have
confidence that He will reach out to us and save us. As Christians we know He will
reach out to us and save us, “He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it
until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). We know that the promises of Jesus
are sure and true. The response to men and women is always the same to those
who are seeking salvation, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:30-31). There is none of the nonsense spoken by so many who would call themselves Christian that they must do penance, that they must ritualise their response, that they must pray to so-called saints for help. The answer is simple, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as God’s Son, as the One who gave Himself voluntarily to die on the Cross at Calvary for our sins, and you will be saved. How much simpler could that be? Contrast that with what man can do to save us. Some years ago I was on a boating holiday with a number of other young Christians on the Norfolk Broads, a stretch of inland waterways close to the open sea. At one point it is necessary for us to take a right turn back onto the Broads at Great Yarmouth or risk going out to the open sea. We gave an instruction to one on board, a young man with a PhD but no common sense, to throw the line to someone on shore in order that we could tie up. He threw the rope but to our astonishment realised that we had not told him to secure it to the boat first and so the man on shore had our rope but was unable to assist us in any way. It was a valuable lesson. Trust God and not man!

95 The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

Until the return of Jesus to this earth we will always have the wicked around us seeking to destroy us through insinuation, through incorrect interpretation of the Scriptures and numerous other ways designed to take our eyes from Jesus. The answer of Jesus should act as an inspiration to us all, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord they God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10). Our spiritual bodies can never be destroyed by the wicked no matter how hard they may try. Our physical bodes will only be destroyed if God allows it. During the 2,000 years since Christianity began, literally millions have lost their lives as martyrs for their faith throughout the world. According to Release International, more Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined with 171,000 being martyred in 2005 alone. Looking at a list of those who were martyred during the Reformation is like a Who’s Who of Protestant Christianity with Sir Thomas More, William Tyndale, George Wishart, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer and a name that will be unknown to most William Hunter. I know about William Hunter because he was burnt at the stake in Brentwood, Essex where I lived when I was first married. He was a young boy who demanded that he be able to read the Bible for himself. For that sin he was martyred. Throughout the Bible we find examples of attempted martyrdom but God intervened — Daniel in the Lion’s den (Daniel 6), and Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). With Jesus they succeeded but only because God allowed it. When it was time, then God gave up Jesus to die in our stead on the Cross, but not before. When we find ourselves surrounded by the wicked, our natural reaction may well be to clench our fists and come out fighting but David’s way was to consider God’s testimonies. The wicked may well be waiting for me but I will eagerly wait upon the Lord who made the heavens and the earth and everything in it. After all, God has told us that we will be granted eternal life with Him in heaven.
96 I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

The first part of this verse reminds me of the Book of Ecclesiastes, “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). It can be translated in so many different ways. Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless (New International Version). Absolutely pointless, everything is pointless (God’s Word translation). All is to no purpose, all the ways of man are to no purpose (Bible in Basic English). What it is really saying is that nothing good will be found in anything that is liable to change and corruption. Solomon is here expressing his sorrow that men and women put such great store in earthly things when they should be setting their sights solely on God who does not change. Every one of us fall remarkably short of God’s perfection, that is why David refers to having seen an end of all perfection. No matter how hard we try, we will never attain perfection on this earth. In contrast, David says that God’s commandments are exceedingly broad, in other words, he cannot see where it finishes.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mem

97 O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

How often do we thank God for His Word, the Bible? Have we ever done so? Yet David is here expressing his love for God’s Word and says unequivocally that it is his meditation throughout the day. No matter what the circumstances, no matter when it is, he knows that the Bible contains the answers to each one of life’s questions. Our natural, human reaction is to try and solve puzzles by ourselves. Our last resort is often God’s Word, if at all. We need to learn from David that it was his first and only resource for dealing with life’s difficulties. We have lived through a decade when youngsters especially wore bands on their wrists with the initials WWJD – what would Jesus do. This was akin to what David was writing about but it needs to be put into practice.” I am a creature of a day. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God. I want to know one thing: the way to heaven. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. He has written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book! At any price give me the book of God. Let me be a man of one book”. -- John Wesley. “The Bible is a wonderful book. It is the truth about the Truth. It is not the Truth. A sermon taken from the Bible can be a wonderful thing to hear. It is the truth about the truth about the truth. But it is not the truth. There have been many books written about the things contained in the Bible. I have written some myself. They can be quite wonderful to read. They are the truth about the truth about truth about the Truth. But they are NOT the Truth. Only Jesus Christ is the Truth. Sometimes the Truth can be drowned in a multitude of words”. --Richard Wurmbrand. “The Bible is the written word of God, and because it is written it is confined and limited by the necessities of ink and paper and leather. The Voice of God, however, is alive and free as the sovereign God is free. 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' The life is in the speaking words. God's word in the Bible can have power only because it corresponds to God's Word in the universe. It is the present Voice which makes the written word powerful. Otherwise it would lie locked in slumber within the covers of a book”. --A. W. Tozer 22.

98 Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? It may seem like a strange question to put into a commentary but it is essential for an understanding of what David is driving at in this verse. If you truly believe, then you will know that God’s commandments are true and they put you at a distinct advantage against the enemies of God. They make you wise and that is important because if we act upon His commandments, we cannot go wrong. Unlike the words of humans, they are ever with us and are unchanging like God Himself. We must always be careful when those of a different persuasion (e.g. Jehovah’s Witnesses) seek to tell us what the Bible says. We can sometimes be made to feel inferior because we do not recognise the verses and for good reason, they are not in the Word of God. They use carefully selected verses, twist them to their own interpretation and then try and persuade us that they are in God’s Word. “But the natural man receiveth not the
things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). I remember a disciplinary meeting held to look at what a congregant was saying about the Scriptures. He held to an exact interpretation of the Bible from the original Greek or Hebrew and not taking into account that such an interpretation produces gibberish and needs to be put into a meaningful format. We were able to show him that some of the words he was using were slanting what had actually been written, not that he saw it that way. For the first time in my life, we had to stop someone actually coming to the Church because he refused to adhere to the leaders’ requests.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

This may appear to be a rather arrogant saying of David but it has great merit. What Almighty God has taught us provides us with greater understanding than what any human teacher is able to pass on to us as a pupil. It is important to recognise that not all teachers are from God and we are told in 1 John 4:1 to test the spirits. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”. If Christians had done that at the so-called Lakeland Revival, in Florida, then it would have been seen early on to be false a long time before taking in so many Christians with their time and money. It appears that we live in an age where experience is more important to many of us than God’s Word. If we meditate upon God’s Word then we will have no need for anything else in our lives. “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:15-18).

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

I know more than a few teachers from my youth who would have been mortified at David’s outspokenness. Here he tells us that his understanding is far greater than that of the ancients (wise old men) but he does at least tell is why that is. He understands man because he not only hears what God has said in His Word but he keeps it, that is he puts God’s Word into action. Head knowledge may turn us into academics but heart knowledge turns us into experienced Christian activists (a zealot for Christ). Remember what Jesus told us, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (James 1:22-24). It must be remembered as well that worldly knowledge is being surpassed all the time. It is a little over a hundred years ago that we first took to the skies in aeroplanes and yet we can now fly at twice the speed of sound. The Wright brothers would have no knowledge of how a jet engine worked and yet in their day they were considered the ultimate engineers. William Tyndale once wrote that, “a ploughboy with the Bible would know more of God than the most learned ecclesiastic who wrote it” 23. Indeed, one of my own ancestors was one such ploughman who
when he had finished in the fields by day, went to the local chapel to preach God’s Word. His knowledge of the Scriptures would have been far greater than probably those who employed him.

101 I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

As an evangelist once wrote in his Bible, “This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book”. This is the kind of sentiment that David was trying to express here, “I have refrained my feet from every evil way”. His way, as we have seen thus far in this Psalm is to dwell upon God’s Word; to meditate upon it; to devour it. He had a voracious appetite but it kept him on the straight and narrow. Now we are aware that like all humans, David had his frailties and he certainly sinned against Uriah, when he slept with his wife Bathsheba and ensured that he was killed in battle to try and assuage his conscience. Unfortunately his conscience was still actively at work and when his deeds were pointed out to him by the Prophet Nathan, he was genuinely sorry for his sin and God for gave him. David’s aim was to keep the Word of God and by refraining his feet from walking into problem areas, he found to be the best method available.

102 I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

In the previous verse David tells us that, “I have refrained my feet” and now we find out why. “I have not departed from thy judgments”. This is the importance of reading and studying the words of Paul in Colossians 4:14, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”. God’s Word is the anchor for our souls; our lives. While David, as with all of us, was taught by men, he readily acknowledges that ultimately he was taught by God. “Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth” (Psalm 86:11). God is the ultimate teacher. We ignore His Word at our peril.

103 How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

This verse gives you some idea of what David thought of God’s Word – sweeter than honey. Personally I don’t like honey but I accept David’s metaphor as saying that the Bible cannot be superseded. George Washington (to whom I am related according to my genealogical studies) said, “it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible” 24. Jesus when tempted by Satan in the wilderness told him, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). We need to remember the words of Paul writing to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible covers every eventuality of life to affirmation of what we believe to correction when
104 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.

It is only through reading and studying God’s Word that David is able to grasp some of the finer points that God is teaching him. How can we be forgiven and reconciled to God? How can we accept that Jesus is the Son of the Living God? All is revealed in God’s Holy Word, the Bible and unless we are willing to study it, we will never truly know. David said that he hates every false way. The reason he could say this is that he now knew the correct way only through God’s teaching him. Oh that we may listen and learn and understand so that we, like David, may know what is right and what is wrong, and follow the right path in our lives.
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Nun

105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Have you ever tried to walk along a dark path where there is no light at all? I have and I found it to be near impossible. When I was in the Army, I used to get off at my train station and walk back the five miles to camp. The quickest way was through the forest which was fine in the summer when it was light but dreadful in the winter when it was dark. No matter how slowly I went I still kept bumping into things along the way. Most of us would have gone along such paths with a torch for a very good reason, because it lights our way and provides us with guidance for the way ahead. David says that in the same way, God’s Word is a light unto his feet in an otherwise dark world. His Word tells me where we should be stepping, and even more importantly, where we should not be stepping. With the Word of God behind us, in front of us and beside us, it is like walking in daylight where nothing can be hidden from our eyesight, but take your eyes off Jesus, and everything in effect turns to darkness. Of course, Jesus is the light of the world as he said in John 8:12, “Then spake Jesus again unto them saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”. Paul wrote, “For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). When Jesus was here on earth we had Him to follow as the light of the world and now that He has departed for heaven, we have Him through God’s Word to follow every step of the way.

106 I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

“I swear by Almighty God that the evidence that I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth”. In effect that is exactly what David has said here, the words uttered by witnesses in a United Kingdom court room. He has solemnly sworn that he will only keep those judgments which fall into the light that God has shined upon them. By his actions, David has firmly attested to all who would hear that he is finally in the camp of a follower of God but we know from previous verses that he is not just a follower, someone who turns up at church services, sings the hymns, says amen in the right place and listens to the sermon, he is a doer, an active participant in all that has taken place. He is in other words a worshipper of God in the truest sense, not just someone who sings His praises but one who actively participates in all that takes place during a service. Oh that we as Christians can find the same passion in our own lives.

“You may have heard the story of two men debating issues of worship. They had quite different ideas on the subject and were unable to persuade one another. At the end of the frustrating discussion one of the men said to the other, “Well, you worship God in your way, and I will worship him in his.”

We may smile at that comment, but we need to remember how varied are the forms of worship that churches have practiced and how vehement debate over worship
sometimes has been. The debate over the use of icons in the eighth and ninth centuries led to violence in the Eastern Church. Differences over worship in the sixteenth century were part of what divided Protestant from Roman Catholic Christianity, a division that continues to our day.

Among contemporary Protestants we find significant differences in worship. Some forms of worship are filled with formal ceremony and ritual, while others are very casual and informal. Some are noisy and boisterous, while others are quiet and contemplative. Some take place in beautiful cathedrals, while others occur in warehouses or fields. In the midst of such diversity Christians sometimes ask if worship is simply a matter of taste. Are all forms of worship equally pleasing to God as long as the worshipers are sincere? Or are some ways of worship acceptable and others not?”

According to Dr. Godfrey, the question of worship generally leaves us with many questions, often unanswered such as:

- Should we use a songbook or an overhead projector?
- Should we sit in pews or chairs?
- What style of music should we use?
- What kind of instruments should we play?
- How should we pray?
- What kind of preaching is appropriate?

Then we get to much weightier matters such as the need for true worship, the character of worship, worship and the Bible, leadership in worship, music and worship, entertainment, evangelism and worship, and worshipping with the heart. I could easily write a book on this whole subject of worship but suffice it to say that many modern day churches get it woefully wrong on the subject of worship, placing greater emphasis upon the singing with worship leaders taking precedence and the preacher coming a pitiful second as a support act. We must get this right or else we seek to slap God in the face.

107 I am afflicted very much: quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word.

As Christians, we will suffer affliction in the same way as the next person but we have the answer and that is God. He is revealed to us through the pages of Scripture which is why David so loved to read and study it. He is revealed to us in prayer, which is why it is important that we do not neglect falling upon our knees before Almighty God. David uses both of these as he prays to God to quicken him (literally, bring me to life) “according unto thy word”. You have said it O God, now do it. He has asked to be quickened as a fire would be stoked to release more heat so he asks God to pour out His blessings upon him according to the promises He has made in His Word. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than the gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:6-8)
God will allow us to be tempted, He will allow us to be afflicted but it all for a purpose that we might be forged by Him that we will stand the tests of time and be presented faultless before Jesus Christ when He returns again (Jude 24-25).

108 Accept, I beseech thee, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me thy judgments.

David may have been a great and a mighty King yet as he stood before Almighty God, he humbly requested that his free-will offerings be found acceptable to Him. This is true humility! Remember the parable that Jesus told of the Pharisee and the Publican (a tax collector). Now a tax collector in those days was even more despised than he is now because he took what was due and then added his cut on top. The Bible tells us that they both went up to the temple in order to pray, to pray to God. The Pharisee prayed, I thank you that I am not like other men who steal, cheat and commit adultery or like this Publican. I fast twice a week and I give a tenth of all I possess away. Now this may sound pretty reasonable but it is very self-centred. The Publican stood a distance away and couldn’t even raise his eyes to God but beat his breast and said, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:9-14) Jesus told this parable not to put down Pharisees but to put in place those who thought themselves better than their fellow man. True humility comes from God. This is born out by the fact that David was not satisfied with God accepting his offerings of prayer, praise, confession and testimony, but that he wanted God to teach him His judgments.

God is the ultimate person in the universe, He is supreme. He owns everything; He created everything; all wealth belongs to Him; all power belongs to Him; He alone is able to give life and take it away. His character is flawless and He possesses perfect righteousness. No one can even begin to match His magnificence and yet for all of this, He longs to spend all of eternity with us. “For thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15). Now that is what you call true humility!

109 My soul is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law.

David is here saying that he takes a great risk being a follower of God. Many millions of people throughout the world know that to be true as they suffer daily for their faith. Many are persecuted, many are imprisoned, many suffer martyrdom and yet they carry on because they know that God ultimately will be their guide and mentor. In recent times in the United Kingdom, we have seen a Christian couple who owned a Bed and Breakfast establishment being taken to court because they refused to allow a gay couple share a bed, even though they said that they would not have allowed any unmarried couple, whether heterosexual or homosexual, to share a bed. We have seen Christian social workers sacked as a consequence of wanting to teach abstinence in young people rather than heading off to an abortion clinic when they get pregnant. We have seen a woman being sacked for wearing a Cross around her neck as a symbol of her faith even though Muslim and Hindi women are allowed to wear symbols of their faith. These are but a few examples of persecution.
of Christians in a modern first world country but thankfully, we have seen no one being martyred for their faith.

I have read many autobiographies of those who were imprisoned for their faith who were able to bring to remembrance whole portions of Scripture learned over the years and to sing His praises. The Apostle Paul was another who found persecution wherever he went (Acts 20:23) and yet he carried on doing what God has commanded him to do by preaching the gospel of Christ crucified. He was prepared for every eventuality because like David before him, he never forgot God’s law and promises. Indeed he was ready to die for the Lord Jesus Christ. “Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep for me and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). He even wrote to the Church at Corinth and laid out for them what he had endured in the name of Jesus. “Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands” (2 Corinthians 11:25-33). He was able to say with some conviction in Romans 8:37-39, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”. What a testimony but oh what a truth!

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts.

Those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour will always seek to lay traps (snares) for us to fall into. We need to be on our guard permanently because they just never give up. It is much like it was during the Korean war when the allies found themselves up against Chinese troops and wave after wave of them would assail the allied fortifications. Hundreds and thousands were mown down but still they kept coming. Likewise, we are foolish if we believe that once we have shown Satan that we cannot be moved, that he will somehow leave us alone. When I was in the Army in my youth, I was constantly hounded and barracked by an individual who would pull me up if I raised my voice and even
though I never swore, to say words that in his eyes condemned me as a hypocrite. How can you be a Christian if you say things like that or lose your temper? We have probably met others just like him at school, at college, or at work. Paul knew what we would be up against and wrote in Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”. In other words, our daily fight is against Satan and his minions who will seek to undermine us at every turn, to put doubt in our minds that we have ever been saved and seeking to drive a wedge between ourselves and God. As David was able to say that he had not “erred from thy precepts” so Paul gives us the antidote to all this sniping and that is to put on the whole armour of God. We have the truth with which we must gird our waist; we must put on the breastplate of righteousness; we must have our feet shod with the gospel of peace; we have the shield of faith which will be used to quench all the fiery darts thrown at us by the wicked on; we have the helmet of salvation and we have the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. We must be mindful of the fact that we need to pray that God will keep us safe. We have been given them to use, so use them!

111 Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

My late wife was fond of looking at ancient buildings, especially around London, and pronouncing them as her heritage. What she was saying was that these stood as a monument to what had gone before but David is actually going further in his use of the word. He is declaring that the Word of God is his monument to what has gone before (that is the promises already fulfilled) and also to the future (the promises still to be fulfilled). Our greatest promise into the future is that if we live, we shall see Jesus come again in all his glory and if in the meantime we should die, then we will meet Him face to face in heaven. A heritage is an inheritance and for us to receive the inheritance we must of necessity be part of God’s family. We rejoice with David that we are part of His family by adoption through the shed blood of Christ on the Cross at Calvary and over forgiveness for the sins we have committed. Extraordinarily I have traced my family tree back to David (he is a direct ancestor) and beyond but that would not have been enough to ensure salvation which comes only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his adoption of me into His family. We have the enduring heritage from God that, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words (my heritage) shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

112 I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end.

Inclination of the heart towards God is a natural by-product of obedience. That is what David has been telling us throughout this Psalm. God’s testimonies, God’s precepts, God’s judgments and God’s statutes are all worth reading and studying and keeping dear to the heart, and as a consequence, his heart is inclined towards Almighty God. How is your heart today? It is vital for us as Christians to veer towards God in all things; to keep ourselves free from sin as much as possible (it is impossible not to sin). David had already written about the necessity for a pure heart, “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy
place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully” (Psalm 24:3-4). Our plea to God should be the same as David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Samech

113 I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.

The reference here is of a person being pulled both ways (double-minded) at once but with David stating categorically his hatred of being pulled towards sinful ends while he loves God’s law. James wrote, “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8). Solomon said something very similar in Proverbs 8:7 when he condemned double-minded speaking when he said, “For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips”. We have all met those who waver in their thoughts, who can change direction as easily as a blade of grass bends in the breeze. Indeed Solomon was just one of many men of God who have turned away from their first love. In Solomon’s case it was the love of women that turned him into a worshipper of false Gods. However, no matter how often we turn away from God, His Word stands firm as God Himself stands firm. It is the one thing of which we can be certain, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

There are times when we as Christians come under attack and we need to find protection, so we go to God, our hiding place. It is a defensive posture against danger, against temptation. David knew all about protection because in his youth he was a shepherd and a very good one at that. We know that he was very good with his slingshot because he felled the giant Goliath and he would also have used it against marauding animals that wanted to get close to the sheep. He also carried with him a staff and he would have been adept at using that in protection of the sheep as well. At night, David was the last line of defence as he would sleep across the entrance to a sheep pen to ensure that anything that wanted to get to the sheep had to go through him first. I love watching Meerkats because they have a wonderful way of guarding against danger. At least one of their number is assigned to keeping watch because everywhere these small creatures have enemies and they could come from land or air. As soon as danger is perceived, they all run to the nearest hole in which to hide. They do not expose themselves to danger and neither must we. When we are ready to go on the offensive, and that includes taking the message of the gospel to others, then we need the shield of faith that is God Himself. Without the shield we again leave ourselves wide open for counterattack from Satan’s minions. We put our trust in the Lord and His Word. No soldier would have ever contemplated going into battle as if it is a stroll in the park. He goes dressed for battle with full armour otherwise he leaves himself vulnerable to the enemy who will surely take full advantage.
115 Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

This verse in my thought process brings me straight back to the words of Jesus, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). We live in an age which some would say was unprecedented for the number of false prophets and ministers of the Word who have sprung up apparently preaching Christ but actually projecting themselves instead (the classic cult). I would argue that it was ever thus and has been going on for the last two millennia since the Lord Jesus Christ walked this earth. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23). I have to say that cults really get under my skin because they are works of Satan and through them he has skewed the lives of millions of people away from the one true God. I was dumbfounded as I watched the events at the so-called Lakeland Revival unfolding on our television screens on God Channel of all places. There were Christians from all over the world who had jumped on planes to be there who were being sucked into a giant con. I could see it so why couldn’t they? The main reason is that we live in an age of instant gratification without questioning where that gratification comes from. We have far too many Christians who are after the next experience rather than being satisfied with a God who can answer all our needs. We do not need charlatans who talk to angels called Emma but to men of God who speak directly to God in prayer; who listen to His commands; who do the will of God and not of man. When we begin to do that, then we will see true revival with many being saved. David was more than content with keeping God’s commandments and wanted nothing to do with these doers of evil. Jesus will return again to this earth to separate the wheat from the chaff; the sheep from the goats; the useful from the useless; the men and women of God from the charlatans who follow Satan. “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).

116 Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

To say that God is our life was literally true for David as he knew that if he was set free from His influence, then he would die. God was his life support systems in every way and this is shown in what have become known as the seven great I am’s of the New Testament. Jesus said,

“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).
“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine” (John 10:14).

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26).

“I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:1-2).

What wonderful promises we have from Jesus that will be fulfilled. David knew that if God kept His side of the bargain then he was safe and God always keeps His promises. David was also concerned lest he be found ashamed of his hope. Now hope in the Bible is the expectation of a favourable future under God's direction. However, David did not need to worry because we have already the Word of God from the prophet Isaiah, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed: for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

117 Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.

Do you remember the first steps you took as a child? Then you truly have a remarkable memory! The important thing about it was the fact that your mother and father were there to guide you through this important milestone in your life. They provided you with security and picked you up when your first tottering steps led you to fall until such time that you were confident enough to go by yourself. The same thing happened when you first rode a bicycle. You first of all had stabilisers fitted in order that you could remain upright and then when they were removed, one or other of your parents would hold you upright until that magic moment when they let you go by yourself. The minute you realise that they are no longer holding you, your confidence rises and off you go by yourself. In the Christian life, we need God beside us every step of the way. It is when we get confident and walk by ourselves that we get into all kinds of mischief. That is why Davis is acknowledging that with God holding him up, he will be safe. It is all well and good for us to read and study God's Word, it is another thing altogether to understand what has been written and yet another thing to actually obey these words; to live them out as a Christian. They are after all, living words from a Living God and should be dealt with appropriately. Respect isn’t just a fancy word we can trot out whenever we feel like it, but one which commands us to act out in reality.

118 Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.

We live in an age when we believe that we should be the people who distribute divine retribution on God’s behalf. Many religions will kill those who change their
faith, others will take vengeance on behalf of God because they say He has been sleighted. What does God say about such matters? “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19), and again in Hebrews 10:30, “Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people”. David recognised this when he said that He had trodden down all who had erred from His statutes. For many centuries, Christians have been wrongly involved in taking retribution, sometimes against neighbours for what can only be described as religious bigotry. In the United Kingdom, we have had centuries of problems between the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities in Ireland and even among football communities in Scotland where Catholic Celtic and Protestant Rangers, both hailing from Glasgow, often clash at football matches. Throughout the world, religious violence has raged. In India, it is between Hindu and Sikh peoples. Between Pakistan and India it is between Muslim and Hindu peoples. In many Muslim countries it is between Sunni and Shia Muslims. What we must remember above all else is that it is God who will judge, and not us.

119 Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.

David loved the testimonies of God because they were undiluted love. God told it exactly as it is without trying to hide anything. We live in an age where we don’t like anything that is concentrated so we look for anything that will dilute it. Even in medicine, we have homeopathy which provides so-called cures for all sorts of ailments that uses medicines that are so diluted that the original ingredients barely even register. God’s love cannot be diluted, else it becomes impotent; useless. So David says that God discards the wicked of the earth like dross. The wicked here are referred to as dross, literally rubbish or garbage as the Americans would say. We do not keep garbage but bury it or destroy it by burning otherwise we would end up with disease. In the same way, the disease of sin has to be dealt with by Almighty God and He discards it forever. It tells us of what is to come on the dreadful Day of Judgment when the secret of all hearts will be exposed for all to see and Jesus, the judge of all men, will separate the sheep from the goats, the pure from the unpure, the saint from the sinner, the wheat from the chaff.

120 My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.

How many of us know what fear is? We know from 24 hour news channels that terrorism can strike at the heart of any community around the world. We see countless natural disasters – flooding, earthquakes, tsunamis – taking place around the world. We are struggling economically following global banking problems. Yet while these fears are very real to many of: just ask the inhabitants of Japan following the recent tsunami and earthquake or recent earthquakes in New Zealand or floods in Australia: they bear no comparison to having a healthy respect and fear for a loving God. The word I am looking for here is awe, an overwhelming wonder, respect or dread that was once only ever used of God but is now used in pop culture and teen culture and has somewhat diluted its original meaning. After God had dealt with Ananias and Sapphira we are told in Acts 5:11, “And great fear came upon all the church”. Now it is doubtful that others had been stealing from God on the scale that this husband and wife had but they were probably equally guilty of sinning
against God in that they had promised God certain sums of money or property and then went back on their word and now rightly feared instant retribution. No wonder that David was afraid of God’s judgments and his flesh trembled at the mere thought of it. We are told in Matthew 10:28 not to fear humans because the worst they can do is to kill your body but God can kill both your body and your spirit and leave it in hell. Now that should concern us because it is God who holds us in his hands and can either put us in either the wheat pile or the chaff pile. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).
121 I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.

What an extraordinary statement this is to make, “I have done judgment and justice”. In effect he is saying that as a King, he is expected to deal with all kinds of matters that come before him and he has done so fairly, and although not stated here but implied elsewhere, in accordance with God’s Word. With God’s Word as his reference book, David sought to bring justice to his people. He was doing what Micah said, “What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8) That is precisely why God delivers us from our oppressors who most certainly do not love justice, else they would all be condemned instantly; do not love mercy because they like to feel they have earned their position in life and are far from humble before the Lord as they boast of their achievements.

122 Be surety for thy servant for good: let not the proud oppress me.

Standing surety for another means to give a guarantee for their well-being or ensuring that a debt is paid. What David was saying is best summed up by Charles Haddon Spurgeon when he said, We should have been crushed beneath our proud adversary the devil if our Lord Jesus had not stood between us and the accuser, and become a surety for us” 26. The proud are no longer able to suppress those who have been saved by the shed blood of Jesus. Our debts, though they were large, have been settled. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:33, ‘Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth”. When we are accused by Satan, we just have to point to Jesus Christ who bore all our sin and justified through the shedding of His blood. I am reminded of that old but nevertheless still marvellous hymn from Augustus Toplady:

“As debtors to mercy alone
If heavenly mercy we sing
Nor fear to draw near to the throne
Our praise and our worship we bring
The wrath of a sin-hating God
With us can have nothing to do
The Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide all our transgressions from view” 27
123 *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.*

David’s eyes were beginning to grow weary as he kept his eyes on the prize that lay ahead – salvation and righteousness. If we stare at the same thing for any length of time we shall find our eyes growing heavy. So it was with David. He was not anxious concerning God’s response because he had done all that God had commanded him. It was all about perseverance – a true mark of a Christian. “For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

124 *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.*

David puts everything into perspective. He is the servant and therefore God must be the Master. In this way David puts himself in the rightful place of looking up to God for his needs. This is not an optional extra in the Christian life but falls at the heart of it. Earlier in Psalm 103 David is already aware of God’s attributes when he says, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy” (v.8). Nowhere do we find David trying to usurp God or become His equal in anything. He always shows due deference to the One who is higher than all; to the One who created all; and to the One who will judge all. He is in awe of God and rightly so because His power is so immense, he could dispatch us all in an instant of he so desired. But verses 13-14 of Psalm 103 go on to say, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust”. We need to be continually learning from God and that is what David asks for when he requests that God teach him His statutes.

125 *I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.*

David appears to relish the term servant as he uses it of himself frequently (this time in four verses). In some quarters it would be used in a derogatory function but to David it is a badge of honour to be worn with pride. As I have been researching my ancestors, I have frequently come across those who had “in service” as their occupation. “In service” is a term used of those who were servants of a great household and while we think of them doing menial tasks such as making the beds, cleaning and polishing, they actually thought of themselves as a fair way up the pecking order because they had board and lodging, and they had regular meals which is more than could be said for the majority of the working class population. In some ways David also thought of himself as far better off than the ordinary person because as a servant of God, he had already made it. He was guaranteed eternal life with God in heaven. What more could he ask for? But having made it, he still put himself in his proper place with God first and himself last, even though he was a King. We all need understanding! No matter what our intellect may be (there was even a book published by evangelist Tom Rees in 1971 entitled Can Intelligent People Believe?), we need to understand what God has put in front of us and David here asks to know God’s testimonies. In other words, he wants spiritual knowledge, something we should all be desiring. It is interesting to note that David asks for understanding first and then knowledge in order to know what it is that God is telling him. For many of us it would be the other way round. We would want knowledge first, try to figure out what is that is being said using our limited intellectual powers...
and then finally requesting understanding from God when all else fails. It is unfortunately the human way and so we need to learn from this, and learn fast.

**126 It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.**

David’s plea for God to work may seem to be rather strange because He is always at work but here he is pleading for God’s intervention because of special reasons. He says they have made void the law of God. That is some statement to make but do not fret because he is not saying that they have done away with God’s law in reality but only in their minds. They have circumvented God’s law and dealt with it as if it no longer existed. We can probably all think of people who have done just this; who appear to have no conscience; who have so belittled God in their own mind that they believe they can take Him on and win. Such people are heading for a mighty fall! There are times when sin is more active in the world and appears to dominate events around us. It is times such as these when we need to depend absolutely upon God as our defence and our bulwark against evil. At such times, God will act to save His Church from calamity for He is good and cannot be beaten.

**127 Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold.**

Do you love the Word of God above all other things? David certainly did! He listed the love of fine gold lower than the Scriptures which he put at number one in his life. Ah but he was a man, I can hear you saying. You would never have got the same reaction from a woman. After all, a woman’s eyes light up whenever they see gold or diamonds and didn’t they sing a song about diamonds are a girl’s best friend? But then we live in an age of reality where certainly there are some girls and women who would love pretty much anything better than God’s Word. Indeed, we cannot just put such thinking just down to girls and women but also to boys and men as well. We are all subject to temptation and need to prioritise what is important in our lives. Once we love the Word of God more than anything else in our lives, then we can move on to putting it in to effect by observing God’s commands. Remember it is what we love that sets our pathway in life. That is why in 1 Timothy 6:10 we are told, “For the love of money is the root of all evil”. Note that it does not say that money is the root of all evil but the love of it. God has graciously given many Christians (but not all) money in order to use for His purposes. We unfortunately have a large number of Christian ministers who preach that unless we are rich then we have failed in our Christian lives. Unless we have perfect health then we are poor Christians. Such people are an abomination in God’s eyes. They preach not the gospel of Jesus Christ but a health and prosperity gospel that is not sanctioned by Scripture. That is why it is important that you read and study God’s Word for yourself and not listen to such charlatans.

**128 Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.**

We live in a time when absolutes do not hold sway for the majority of the population, where even Christians sway in the wind of human opposition on such issues as homosexuality and living in sin with another person. As Christians, we take our lead from God who has never hated the sinner (else we would all be in very serious
trouble) but hated the sin. Sin is an abomination to God and worthy of one
punishment only, and that is eternal spiritual death and banishment from God’s sight.
There has been much controversy lately about a book by Rob Bell in which he
appears to back universalism which states that God will eventually pardon everyone
and allow them into heaven. There have been those who back such viewpoints who
tell us that God is a God of love and would never contemplate anyone not being able
to enter heaven. There have been those proponents of the supremacy of the Bible
who state that God is a God of love and of justice. He despises sin and any that can
be found (that is sin that has not been covered by the blood of Jesus) will be dealt
with on the Day of Judgment when He will say to such people, “And then will I
profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew
7:23). That is God’s judgment on all who sin and do not seek His forgiveness. I take
no joy in seeing fellow men and women consigned to hell but then that is why I am
not God. God detests sin and will have no part in it. God has given us a way out of
such a predicament. He said, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall
humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways;
then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2
Chronicles 7:14). There are some people who appear to have no conscience about
certain sins and would therefore consider it the right path for them. They will have to
take the consequences for their sins, terrible though they are. However as
Christians, we know the correct path to take and we must stick to it.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Pe

129 Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.

God’s testimonies are indeed wonderful! They provide us with more comfort than we can begin to express. It is no wonder that David says he attempts to keep them. It was David’s son Solomon who wrote, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). His initial thinking and inclinations were correct even though later on he strayed from these precepts. As a Christian, I think this verse is best summed up in another Scripture, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16-17).

As I am writing these words, I began to sing William How’s majestic hymn:

“It is a thing most wonderful
Almost too wonderful to be
That God’s own Son should come from heaven
And die to save a child like me” 28

130 The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.

Some year ago, I took my family on a holiday to Germany to see my brother who was serving in the British Army of the Rhine. We stayed in a delightful German house complete with shutters on the windows. As my two children were very young, we were able to put them to bed very early because the shutters meant that the bedroom was pitch black. It was a deception to the brain making them think that it was night time and they went to sleep and we had to wake them up in the morning, so it worked well. This verse talks of the illumination that God brings to His Word. It is as if the shutters had been opened and the light permeates every corner of the room. It gives understanding even to the simple. When God’s Word shines forth, then we begin to understand. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

131 I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments.

David here leaves us with an image of an animal that has been running with the tongue hanging out and panting for breath. It leaves us with a vivid picture of David’s hunger for the Word of God. He was not ashamed of this knowledge, indeed he wanted everyone to know it. He was moved by God’s Word; he was excited at the prospect of learning even more from it. Oh that we may be so moved in our
desire to learn from God. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1).

132 Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

If David is not learning from God’s Word then he is on his knees in prayer. David’s prayer was simple but effective. Look upon me and be merciful to me. He was merely asking God to notice him and show him mercy, that divine forgiveness that can only come from God and is completely undeserved. He was not asking for pity, the sort of reaction which comes from us humans, but compassion because he needed a portion of God’s love. It reminds me somewhat of Jesus in John 21:15-17 asking Peter if he loved Him; not once but three times. In the end, Peter was getting a little fed up with being asked the same question again and again but Jesus was here dealing with a frail human being who changes frequently. When David requested mercy from God however, he knew that whatever He said would be done because God cannot change. The mark of a true believer is that they love the name of God.

133 Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

It was Confucius who said that said that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” 29. In other words, every journey, no matter how short or long it might be requires us to take a single step in order to start it. David is here asking God to put our feet, step by step, in accordance with His Word. He determines the length of our journey and He determines the direction of the journey. The Christian walk is directed towards heaven along the narrow path that leads to righteousness. In order for our walk to be a free as possible from any interference, it is important that sin has no hold over us otherwise we will find ourselves being deviated away from the true path.

134 Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep thy precepts.

Centuries after this was written, Jesus said that we are to pray, “Lead us not into temptation” (Matthew 6:13). Here David is praying that God may deliver him from the oppression of man. Oppression by our fellow man can take many different forms. There are laws that seek to oppress rather than make free; there are books written in such a way as to injure another party – “the pen is mightier than the sword” 30; even Ministers of the Word have been known to use sermons as a means of oppressing an individual or individuals within a congregation. The reason why David seeks deliverance is that he may keep God’s precepts. This verse is best summed up by the phrase, from oppression to obedience.

135 Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes.

David is asking that he might be brought into the light of Almighty God through His shining upon him. “God is light”, declares John, “and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). As plants require sunshine in order to grow, so we need the light of God
to shine upon us in order that we can grow and mature as Christians. We need the light to teach us about God’s pardon, about our justification by faith, about our adoption as sons and daughters and about our assurance that we belong to God. David once again is only interested in pleasing God through learning more of His statutes.

136 Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon referred to tears as “liquid prayers” 31, a brilliant description for such a simple but yet at the same time, complicated part of the human anatomy. Throughout the Scriptures, tears are shed because of pain or suffering (2 Kings 20:5); because of joy (Genesis 33:4); because of compassion (John 11:35); because of desperation (Esther 4:1,3); because of agony (Isaiah 42:14); because of repentence (Joel 2:12-13). Here David sheds tears because of people’s inability to keep God’s law. Such was his love for God and of His law, His statutes, and commands that he didn’t just shed tears because they were difficult to keep, they literally ran down his face like rivers of water because they were doomed to hell. This is a broken heart that is yielding itself to Almighty God. Oh that we likewise may shed tears when we stray from God’s path. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5-6).
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Tzaddi

137 Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments.

This is a wonderful encapsulation of God in action because righteousness is an active word, not a passive one. It demands that God acts in accordance with His own Word. Simply because God is righteous, we know for a certainty that all His decisions will be good and right. They will never deviate but follow the same path, time after time. God is always daytime and never dusk. If God is righteous, then we have no need to worry because His judgments will always be spot on. “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5). “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

138 Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.

Carrying on from the previous verse, David speaks specifically of God's testimonies as being righteous and therefore very faithful. How could they be anything else? God, who knew no sin; whose very back is turned against sin in any form; who despises the very concept of sin, is absolutely true to His Word, His testimonies, His precepts and is totally reliable. His love for us never changes for which we are eternally grateful. My daughter in law is currently experiencing extreme post-natal depression and she is very concerned that she cannot love God. We have had to try and explain that it is God's love for us that never changes and He understands our temporary un-love for Him for whatever circumstances. Depression by its very nature is a mind thing but our bodies can act out our love for God even if our minds are temporarily incapable of doing so.

139 My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.

One thing that irritates me above all others is when false prophets come to my doorstep and incorrectly quote Scripture. Over the years, I have seen the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Christadelphians and others whose take on the Bible is not what God intended. They have forgotten God’s Word as David says in this verse, or more accurately, they have misused God’s Word for their own ends by not taking any heed of what God is actually saying. Even Satan quoted Scripture at Jesus when He was being tested in the desert. “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matthew 4:6). David rightly became zealous for God and His Word that they might be respected. Are we ardently active? Are we utterly devoted to the things of God? Are we passionate to see God’s Kingdom extended throughout the world? That is the true meaning of zealousness for a Christian.
140 Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.

Everything to do with God is pure, that is without any defect or any additional components. David had earlier said that, “The words of the LORD are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). How can God’s Word be anything but pure when it emanates from the lips of One who is purity Himself? No wonder David loved it! When gold or silver is purified, it allows the dross to rise to the surface and it is poured away leaving only that which is pure. Unlike human writings which are vain and fallible, God’s Word is a byword for purity. Our faith is to be built on firm foundations with God’s Word at the centre. “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27).

141 I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts.

We live in a time when status is everything and the loss of it can be devastating. This is bad enough during a person’s working life but upon retirement he or she can become almost a non-person. Yet here is David openly admitting that he is small, not in stature, but in comparison with God. It was recognition of a reality in David’s, and our lives. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30), said John the Baptist. It was a question of true humility on John’s part and on David’s as well. We may be the best preacher that the world has ever known but in comparison with God, we are nothing; we are small. David, like us, has had to live with being despised because we seek to do that which is right in the sight of God, and in David’s case, it was not forgetting God’s precepts. Living a life worthy of God is going to make ourselves plenty of enemies but we have to remember that we are not in a popularity contest but we are in a fight for our very spiritual lives and pleasing God is what it is all about.

142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.

As human beings, we are used to everything being determined by time which is a Godly invention for our purposes. “I will see you at 6 o’clock; I’ll be there in an hour” or my favourite for my own children and now my grandchildren, “in a minute”. In heaven, time does not exist because everything is eternal, in other words, it goes on for ever. We struggle to come to terms with this concept because as I have been looking at my family tree and have gone back over 4,000 years to people in the Bible, it is but an instant in God’s eyes. David is here expressing that God’s righteousness is not for an instant but literally goes on for ever, and God’s law is absolute truth. Why? Because God does not lie; He is incapable of lying and that gives us great comfort because we know that everything He has said will be true and remain true for evermore. God is eternal and everything about Him, all His attributes, are eternal as well. “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art
righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou has judged them” (Revelation 16:5)

143 Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.

David confirms that life is not a bed of roses for a Christian, instead that trouble and anguish have taken hold of him. Jesus had spoken of these things, comforting His disciples with the words, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). That is why so many Christians suffered martyrdom with smiles on their faces because they knew they were passing through the earthly trials into a heaven of peace. “Confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Knowing this, David is still able to say that God’s commandments are his delight. I saw this in reality when I watched my late wife die of a brain tumour. Her faith grew stronger and stronger as the time of her death drew near and she became a constant comforter for those who came to see her. I convinced her to write her testimony which I then got published as a booklet for the thanksgiving service and we had it put on to the Church website as well. It has been a constant help to others as she urged people to praise the Lord no matter what their circumstances. She knew where she was going and she wanted everyone else to know as well.

144 The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.

The first half of this sentence is a reiteration of what David wrote in verse 142 but it never does anything but help us in providing good news. He goes on to ask God for understanding in order that he might live. We are not automatons who follow because God has decreed that we should or hard wired in order that we do as we are told. God has given us an intellect in order that we can understand what He is saying to us. He has also given us freedom of will in order that we can make up our own minds which direction we want to follow. There will be some things that we quote which we frankly do not understand, or at least not fully, but by faith we accept them and when we get to heaven, all will be revealed to us. God calls us to study His Word in order that we might have live lives in accordance with it. No matter how long we have been studying the Bible, there is always something else to learn.
CHAPTER NINETEEN

Koph

145 I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes.

This stanza is all to do with prayer – the need for it, the subject of it, the moment of it, the length of it, the place of it, the reason for it, the comfort of it, and the foundation of it. Why do we pray? It is a question that has been posed by virtually every child and it is a sensible one because if God knows everything we desire and in fact knows our thoughts before we do, why do we waste our time in telling Him? As a child will often ask his human father for things that they want in their life, so we also ask our Heavenly Father for things that we need as well. Jesus thought nothing of offering up His soul to His Father when He was here on earth, indeed He wouldn’t do anything without praying about it first. Apart from the occasion when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by using the model prayer (or what we now know as the Lord’s Prayer), there are several other occasions when the Scriptures recorded the words used by Jesus to His Heavenly Father. In Matthew 11 and Luke 10, there is prayer of praise that everyone can know God. In John 11 there is the prayer before He raises Lazarus from the dead. In John 12, Jesus prays that God’s name be glorified as He goes through His time of torment prior to His crucifixion. In John 17 we find the longest prayer recorded in Scripture in which He consecrates Himself to the task that lies ahead for our sake and not His. It helps us to understand the unique relationship between Himself and God the Father and His selfless love for us sinners. In Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22, Jesus prays while His disciples sleep and it shows the wonderful trust that Jesus had of His Father and of His complete obedience to see through what He had set out to do. Finally in Matthew 27, Mark 15 and Luke 23, we see Jesus in utter desolation as He recognises the significance of His death. He has been abandoned by His Father and in this one act, we were all offered a fresh start and a new relationship with God. All of these prayers provide us with wonderful examples and lessons for all of us to follow. Here David does not just pray but cries out with his whole heart, what we might call a heart-felt plea to God. Guy H King said, “No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it” 32. Wayne Grudem helpfully comments: “Prayer is not made so that God can find out what we need ... God wants us to pray because prayer expresses our trust in God and is a means whereby our trust in him can increase. In fact, perhaps the primary emphasis of the Bible’s teaching on prayer is that we pray with faith, which means trust or dependence on God” 33. David’s prayer was that he might keep God’s statutes and thereby, frustrate the devil.

146 I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.

David calls out to God once again but this time it is more specific because he wants to be saved. Now it is obvious from what has gone before in this Psalm, and indeed through all of David’s Psalms, that God has already granted him salvation. So what is David asking to be saved from? The answer lies in the multitude around him who were oppressing and persecuting him. Now the extraordinary thing is that it is the very oppression by men who hate God which is driving David to God. How ironic!
Opposition often does this. It does not achieve its primary objective of driving a wedge between ourselves and God but makes us cling more fiercely to Him and actually drives us closer. David wanted to be saved from his tormentors in order that he could keep God’s testimonies. Note here that the core of David’s prayer was very short, “save me”. Can we learn from this? I hope so! Like most of you, I have endured prayer meetings, probably more than I would care to mention which has been dominated by one or two individuals who seem to suffer from verbal diarrhoea who, although I am sure it is not the case, appear to be competing with each other for the longest prayer. I have always been impressed by short and to the point prayers by some who are intimidated by these “prayer giants”; giants only in the length of time it takes them to say anything. We do not need to be intimidated by individuals or the whole concept of prayer because in essence “Prayer is communication between a Father and His children...... Why should we pray? Prayer brings the power of God to bear on the situations that we are concerned about. Prayer is one of the ways that God is able to work in our lives and in the lives of others, and it opens new possibilities. So we can freely bring all of our concerns, our thoughts and desires, our hurts and our needs to Him, knowing that He is our loving Father, who wants to hear from us”.

147 I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.

When do you pray? I suspect that most people pray before they go to sleep but for some, it is the joy of getting up early before the sun has even risen to bring their prayers to Almighty God. I have never understood those nuns and monks who get up in the middle of the night, not because they want to but because they are told to do so. What joy is there in that sort of behaviour? God does not punish for us for not praying at certain times of the day. Muslims have what they call Salat. “Salat is the obligatory Muslim prayers, performed five times each day by Muslims. It is the second Pillar of Islam.

God ordered Muslims to pray at five set times of day:

- **Salat al-fajr**: dawn, before sunrise  
- **Salat al-zuhr**: midday, after the sun passes its highest  
- **Salat al-'asr**: the late part of the afternoon  
- **Salat al-maghrib**: just after sunset  
- **Salat al-'isha**: between sunset and midnight

It has been rightly been called a prayer ritual and has been going on for the past 1,400 years and involves only set prayers.

David was on his knees before God when it was still dark not because he had to but because he wanted to. I would love to be able to tell you that I do the same thing, but I don’t. For the third successive verse, he mentions that he has been crying before God, such is the intensity of his prayers. This is what prevented him from
sleeping or being curled up under a warm blanket in bed. David hoped in God’s Word. What a wonderful expression of the living hope that we all have in the One whose finger wrote the words on the pages of Scripture. As Spurgeon said, “He who is diligent in prayer will never be destitute of hope. Observe that as the early bird gets the worm, so the early pray-er is soon refreshed with hope”.

148 Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.

When Paul declared, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), he didn’t mean us to be praying twenty four hours a day, but that our attitude in life should be one of prayer and that we should take everything to God in prayer. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). The prophet Samuel even declared it was a sin not to pray when he said, “God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23). David was a brilliant student of prayer, never resisting the opportunity to speak to God no matter what time of the day or night it was. He speaks in this verse of his eyes preventing the night watches. A watchman would literally call out the time of the night but David was already at prayer and so engrossed in it that he would not have heard them calling. David instead was meditating upon God’s Word. Can you imagine what we could do with such fervency in our lives? God could use us mightily in taking His Word forward to the ends of the earth.

149 Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.

David pleads with God to hear him in accordance with His loving kindness, in other words, His love for us. God’s love represents the very essence of God. We are told in Romans 5:8-9, “But God commended his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him”. Can you begin to understand the intensity of God’s love toward us? While we were still sinners, while we were prevented from seeing God face to face because of the sin that formed a barrier between us, Jesus Christ died for our sins, taking away the barrier and allowing us to converse directly with God. It was because of that sacrifice that we are able to pray to God with great confidence that He will hear us and respond accordingly. David prayed that he might be quickened according to God’s judgment. David’s utterances like our own are important and they need to be interpreted according to God’s judgments.

150 They draw nigh that follow after mischief: they are far from thy law.

Most of us have been very fortunate in not being openly persecuted for our faith. We live in religious-tolerant countries where we are free to hold whatever views we want although this is changing in the United Kingdom with evangelical Christians being persecuted through the courts for so-called homophobia and even street preachers have been arrested for inciting religious intolerance by calling people sinners. However in David’s time, persecution was very rife according to his writings because he speaks of those intent upon mischief; those that are far from God’s law drawing
ever closer to him. But we have the perfect answer. Jesus Himself said in His Sermon on the Mount, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened up to you: For every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). Remember that when we feel pressed in on all sides by those who would oppose God and us, we merely need to ask.

151 Thou art near, O LORD; and all thy commandments are truth.

It doesn’t matter how near the enemy might be to us because we have in God One who is even closer and with all His commandments true, what have we to concern ourselves about? We often concern ourselves with not doing enough for God but when we receive opposition then we must be doing something right. We have the great promises of God throughout Scripture: “Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed’ for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9). “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kings 6:16). We have this astonishing response from God that while our enemies might be numerous, that they are easily outnumbered by the loyal troops of God. If we needed any more convincing then look at the words from 1 John 4:4, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”. What a reminder if ever we needed one that God is greater than all His foes and will always overcome.

152 Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.

David had known about God’s testimonies since he was a youth and now that he was somewhat older, he was able to look back with fond memories. The point that David is making is that what God has written and said will stand for ever. They will not change as God Himself cannot change. That gave David as it gives us as well, confidence in His testimonies. The whole plan of salvation had been fixed before the foundation of the world. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ” (Romans 8:35) is a question posed by the Apostle Paul. The answer of course is no one can come between Jesus Christ and those who have been sanctified; those who have been redeemed by the shedding of His precious blood. Paul was persuaded, as was David, and so should we that nothing at all shall separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).
CHAPTER TWENTY

Resh

153 Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law.

This verse could be summed up with the following words: Lord do not forget my sorrow. I do not forget thy law. David’s plea to God to be his advocate is outstanding for who could ever beat God in a court of law. David’s affliction, whatever it may be has already been mentioned before in verses 50, 67, 71 and 75 and it has not stopped. Is it perhaps like Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), a sort of electric fence that gently reminds a sheep not to cross? Who knows! What is important is that it drove David back to God time and time again and not away from God. David has learned as Paul did later on that, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Throughout these infirmities, David never forgets God’s law.

154 Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.

In this verse, David is the forerunner for all Christians everywhere who turn to Jesus Christ to be our advocate with the Father, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:1-3). Here he is calling once again upon God to be his advocate, to plead his case and even more importantly, to deliver him from his oppressors. We have the certainty that God will win all cases that He takes on because His Word tells us that this is so.

155 Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.

This is a stark reminder to those who would, in effect, laugh at God’s plans for each one of us, that those who are wicked; those who do not obey God’s Word; those who do not seek God’s salvation, will not find salvation. Almighty God is willing and abler to save anyone who puts their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour but will condemn all others to an eternity in hell. This is the essence of John 3:16 which are wonderful words of comfort and true to those who follow Jesus, but despicable words to those who have turned their backs on Him.

156 Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD: quicken me according to thy judgments.

What a wonderful statement this is from David as he says, “Great are your tender mercies, O LORD”. God’s mercies are great because they endure for ever, throughout time and are so vast that they can cover the sins of all us poor souls. No
matter how much we sin, God is able to cover them with ease with His mercy. This is the essence of the story told by Matthew in which Peter asked Jesus how many times we should forgive our neighbour who sins against us. Peter suggested that seven times was sufficient but Jesus responded by suggesting a figure of seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22), 490 times or as many times as it takes. As God’s mercy is limitless, so our capacity to forgive others should be limitless as well. David goes on to pray that he might be quickened (brought back to life) according to God’s judgments. Everything that David asks for is in accordance with God’s Word.

157 Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.

Here was David as King of Israel and yet he suffered mightily at the hands of those who persecuted him for his faith, for his devotion to YAHWEH. It was a sort of insurrection by his own people and yet he did not seek to quell them as despots do by riding roughshod over them but by pleading to God. There were many (not a few) who despised and hated David because of his stand. What a comfort we have in knowing that the world hated Jesus before it hated us. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19). When such things happen, we are to take it as a badge of honour that we are persecuted, for Jesus told us, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). This gives me a wonderful thrill to know that I am being put on par with all the great prophets of old and will receive my reward in heaven for my perseverance. No wonder David was proud to say that he did not decline from God’s testimonies. When I stop to think of all the millions who have given their lives as martyrs over the centuries and many more still who have willingly suffered at the hands of God’s enemies and are still doing so even today, it somehow makes my faith more personal, more real.

158 I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

David looked at the transgressors (the sinners; the faithless) and was grieved (disgusted) with what he saw because they did not keep God’s Word, they despised God’s promises and thought them nothing. David was passionate about his faith as has been seen throughout this Psalm. He probably saw himself in these wretches before him as he was before he believed. He knows that it is so easy to say yes to God but the pull of the world is such that it is a great step. We do not need to look far before we see such people around us. A daily look at our television screens will show us the kind of sins being perpetrated. Another youngster goes on a shooting spree in a local high school; another bunch of people tied up in the drug culture and so we could go on. We have been set free because Jesus died on the Cross at Calvary for you and me. We have been given true hope of everlasting life and peace because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. It is good that we are grieved at the
sight of sin and it should make us pray more fervently and re-double our efforts to take the gospel message to those who are currently lost to God.

159 Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness.

David’s love of God’s Word is evident for all to see and his great desire is that he may be quickened (brought back to life) through God’s loving kindness. No matter that the world hated him as they did God Himself because with God on his side, everything would be fine. He was certain that God would see him through these trials and hardships because of His promise, “And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deuteronomy 31:8). This was confirmed by Jesus in the New Testament when He said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). What a comfort these words are to Christians everywhere and in every circumstance knowing that Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, is there standing beside us every step of the way and will never leave us.

160 Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.

This is a bold declaration that all that God has said and written is true from the very beginning and will be until the very end. God is unchangeable and so is His Word. Every judgment, every statute, every law and every command of God will outlive the stars. “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). Again in Luke 21:33, “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”. We have the certainty that we are sinners saved from damnation by the blood of Christ. That will not change because there is no appeal against God’s decisions which became law every time they are made. After all, who is higher than God who could hear such appeals? If we could lose our salvation that would make God a liar and He most certainly is not that. God’s Word is true, it is reliable and we are therefore able to trust it implicitly.
CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Schin

161 Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.

It is not unusual for Kings and Princes to use their authority and might to persecute those who love God. History is littered with such individuals and the Bible is full of those who “did evil in the sight of God”. In Britain we have had a long history of strife between catholic and Protestant Monarchs who set about trying to destroy the other side’s adherents. Even the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings was often pursued by His enemies, the religious authorities of the day, the Scribes and the Pharisees. The important thing is that David was not overawed because it happens to be fellow Princes who are responsible for the persecution. He loves God’s Word and stands by every word of it and lays everything at the feet of God who will ultimately deal with all who oppose Him (1 Peter 3:13).

162 I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.

David contrasts his love for God’s Word with finding great treasure. Recently in Britain, a man with a metal detector located a priceless helmet made of gold that was centuries old and he found it just below the surface in a field. It sold at auction for around £3 million. This is what David is talking about. The Word of God is something to stand in awe of because it is priceless and yet it is so easy to find if we bother looking. It is not only the finding of God’s Word that is important though, for once it has been discovered, it is important that we read and study it in order that God can reveal the riches of His Word to us all. I have heard of those who covet the earliest Bibles to be produced – Wycliffe’s Bible of the 1380s, the Gutenburg Bible of the 1450s (the first to be printed), Tyndale’s New Testament of the 1530s, Martin Luther’s translation into German of the 1530s, and Myles Coverdale’s translation of 1535. The reason why they want them is not because they wish to read them but to say that they possess them. What is the point in owning a Bible, which Christians in many countries of the world have literally laid down their lives for over the centuries, but never open it, never study what has rolled off the tongue of God? Spoil is something that victorious troops carry off after a war has been won. The Bible is our spoil and we should be thankful that it is a treasure upon which a value cannot be put. It is interesting to note that the Parliamentarian forces of Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War all carried with them a Bible in order that they would never be far from the Word of God.

163 I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love.

David might just have said that God is truth while Satan is lies. God’s law, indeed His whole Word represents truth that is unchanging and unchangeable. “I know that, whatever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be out to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability (unchangability) of his counsel,
confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for
God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold
upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both
sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whithers the forerunner
for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever, after the order of
Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:17-20). See also James 1:17 and Hebrews 13:8. Satan,
however, represents every kind of falsehood imaginable. With him, his words will
change from day to day and even hour to hour according to circumstance. He is
never the same because he is always seeking to trap more prey and will use any
means to do so. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will
do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there
is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar,
and the father of it” (John 8:44). Liars, according to David, are those who oppose
the Word of God simply because they are against the truth and speak out about it.
Satan’s lies have deceived many into believing that they can do what they want; to
please themselves so long as they do some “good” for others. This is a lie because
unless we give our whole beings to God, then we cannot be called Christians and we
will therefore go to hell. At the Day of Judgment, each one of us will stand before the
Lord Jesus Christ and will be judged according to our deeds. Words are cheap and
that is why so many lies can be found around those who do not love God. If you can
truly say to God that I accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour and that He has
forgiven my sins because of what He accomplished on the Cross at Calvary, then we
will be saved. No matter what others may say, they will be condemned out of their
own mouths.

164 Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.

Whether David literally praised God seven times each day or indeed seventy times
seven each day (Matthew 18:22) is immaterial. What is important is that David
praised God FREQUENTLY each day. We read in Psalm 34:1 that, “I will bless the
LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth”. Paul writing to the
Church at Colosse said, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which
also ye are called in one body: and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). Writing to the
Church at Thessalonica, he also said, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of
God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Interestingly this
comes straight after his instruction to “pray without ceasing”. David is here saying
that because of God’s righteous judgments, he cannot do anything but praise Him all
day long. How often do we praise God each day? An hour or more or is it more like
a couple of minutes squeezed in somewhere?

165 Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.

It should be noted that David is not talking about those who keep God’s law but
those who love God’s law. No matter how hard we try, we will always be breaking
some of God’s law each and every day. Why is it that some Christians exude an
aura of peace and tranquility round about them as they go about their daily
business? I long to ape that sort of condition, but alas have not been able to do so.
David is saying that peace is the normal order for those who love God because any
fight does not belong to us but to God who is fully able to defend Himself. I have
always wondered about the endless number of people of all religious persuasions who have set off to fight others to protect their religion as if their “god” is totally impotent and needs their assistance. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). We have the promise from God, so let’s act upon it.

166 LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.

We live in the present but our hope is in the future when Jesus returns again to receive unto Himself all who truly belong to Him. Note the order of things that David writes here. Firstly he hopes for salvation and secondly he keeps God’s commandments. This is salvation by grace alone and is not dependent upon doing God’s commandments or good works. They come as a natural extension of being a Christian. So many people have tied themselves up in knots over this issue determining that unless they are seen to do good works, they will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Martin Luther struggled for some time with this issue finally determining that we didn’t need to prove our worth to God because there was nothing we could do that would make us worthy but merely to accept God’s good gift of grace. He felt too that the selling of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church was a giant fraud established not for that the soul of a sinner could have even a day cut from the sentence, but as a means of fund raising for the Church. The truth is that unless and until your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, you are destined for hell. Jesus tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26). It is a natural extension of faith that we desire to do good works for our fellow man but good works without the faith that preceded it will not get us to heaven.

167 My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly.

We often talk about a vicious circle where one bad thing leads to another bad thing. What we have here in this verse could best be described as a loving circle. The more we keep God’s testimonies, the more we shall love them and the more we love them, the more we shall keep them. It is all about two words – trust and obedience. Trust is defined as reliance on God who is Himself trustworthy. It is summarised in Psalm 18:2 where God alone can be the object of trust and faithfulness because he “is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler (shield), and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower (my stronghold)”. Obedience in Christian terms is defined as yielding to the authority of God and His commands. In the New Testament, faith is obedience, “But God be thanked, that ye were servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you” (Romans 6:17); unbelief is disobedience, ““But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:16-17). Christian obedience means imitating the holiness of God (1 Peter 1:15; the humility and love of God (John 13:14,34); and submission to higher powers instituted by God (Romans 13:1; Ephesians 6.1). David obeyed God’s testimonies
because he had a trust in God. Likewise his love was one of desire not of duty. Which one of these do you follow?

168 I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.

David had kept God’s testimonies and precepts. He proudly shouted it from the rooftops because his life was an open book before God. His whole life was laid out before God who could scrutinise everything that he had done and his motives for doing so. Later on David said, “Search me, O God and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked ways in me, and lead me in thy way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24). David had asked God to search his open life and see if he was telling the truth. He had no problem with opening himself up in that way. I wonder if we would be willing to do the same.
169 **Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.**

David pleads before God with tears in his eyes, such is the fervency of his prayers. How many times have we been found crying before God as we pleaded with him, perhaps for the soul of a loved one or the healing of a loved one? To David it was normal for him because he was a prayer warrior who would spend time at any hour of the day or night on his knees before God. We have the promise from God that He “will wipe away tears from off our faces” (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 7:17). Although David did not know it at the time, he was to take Christ’s example as his own, “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Hebrews 5:7). Even though He was part of the Godhead, Jesus cried out to His father in prayer. There was nothing unmanly about it but rather natural. Jesus also cried at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 13:34-35). The British are rather renowned for their reserve, their stiff upper lip attitude to adversity and this is perhaps personified by the Royal Family who will never show grief publicly, believing that they have a duty to perform. Our duty before God is to be as natural as possible. As Christians, we must certainly follow David’s example in prayer and what David asked for in this instance, an understanding of His Word.

170 **Let my supplication come before thee: deliver me according to thy word.**

David here decides to seek supplication, that is asking something for himself and in doing so in the sure knowledge that he will be heard by God and that his words will be weighed very carefully before an answer is forthcoming. What he is requesting is that he might be delivered according to God’s Word, but delivered from what exactly? Well there is deliverance from sin; deliverance from Satan; deliverance from his persecutors and accusers (his enemies). He was also asking that if temptation befall him, that he might be shown the means of escape. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye might be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). As all that David prayed was in accordance with God’s Word, he knew that it would be answered in the affirmative.

171 **My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.**

David moves on from asking God to be taught His Word to telling God what will happen when he has been taught. “My lips shall utter praise”, or quite literally, My lips will bubble up with praise, like a fresh water spring. It gives you a sense of the joy attached to knowing God’s Word. It is the same sense of wonder and amazement that John Newton showed when he penned the words to the hymn, Amazing Grace:
"Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see" 37

John Newton was a most remarkable character. He was a captain of a slave trading ship when one day on a return journey he called upon the Lord to save him and that He duly did. He left to become a surveyor of tides in Liverpool. During that time he became great friends with George Whitfield, a prominent preacher of the period as well as John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church. He had a desire to be ordained as a Minister and he was duly installed in the Church at Olney in Buckinghamshire which had to be extended to cope with the vast numbers who came to hear him preach. Amazing Grace was but one of hundreds of hymns that he wrote about his own experience of God's good grace but also based upon Ephesians 2:4-9:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved); And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”.

The epitaph on John Newton's gravestone says:

JOHN NEWTON, Clerk [preacher]
Once an infidel and libertine
A servant of slaves in Africa,
Was, by the rich mercy
of our Lord and Saviour
JESUS CHRIST,
restored, pardoned and
appointed to preach
the Gospel which he had
long laboured to destroy.
He ministered,
Near sixteen years in Olney, in Bucks,
And twenty eight years in this Church.

Written by John Newton, it is engraved on a marble plaque in St Mary, Woolnoth, UK.

When we stand before Almighty God we cannot but utter praises to Him for all His goodness; for His enduring Word and for life eternal granted to us by the shedding of blood on the Cross. We have so much to be thankful for and so much to praise God
for. Can you imagine the worship of God next time we all meet together if our lips literally bubbled up with praise?

172 My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.

In the preceding verse, David sang God’s praises and now he is ready to preach them. Those of us who preach do not do so out of a sense of having to because it is our job in life but because we can’t be kept away from the pulpit. Our lips are ready to speak of God’s Word. It is the core of our preaching and all of it is to glorify God, teach the Christian listener and seek to convict those outside of God’s family. There is a great joy in preaching God’s Word, a great satisfaction but also a great responsibility. “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul” (Psalm 66:16). The reason why we preach is because all of God’s commandments are righteous. We speak of what we know and we know because God has taught us. That is why it is important for a preacher to spend quality time with the Lord in preparation. No matter how long we have been preaching, whether it is 5 minutes or 50 years, unless we spend time alone with Almighty God then we are likely to fail in our task. It is a joy always to hear a true man of God preach because he speaks God’s words. If we are in secular employment then there will often be a prohibition on talking about certain subjects – normally politics and religion because they are the most likely to cause dissension. However a Christian can speak eloquently merely by the way he conducts himself and that can speak volumes without a word being uttered.

173 Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.

It is important in life that we never take our eyes from the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what David is here saying when he says, “Let thine hand help me”. It is important for Christians in their daily lives but is doubly important for those entrusted to preach God’s Word. We have probably all seen this in action when a preacher hits the right note in the pulpit week after week and you all find that you have truly met with God. Then on other occasions you can come away very disappointed. Why? Sometimes it is because we have left the preacher exposed by not praying earnestly for him. Other times it is because the preacher took his eye off the ball and it merely glanced his head instead of hitting it fully, or indeed misses it altogether. Anyone who intends to bring God’s Word to others must be right with God. We trust Him implicitly and leave everything in His capable hands. However, we would not even consider doing such a thing unless we know God’s Word, or as David puts it, His precepts. Our part of the bargain is that we read and study the Bible diligently, bringing such times to the Lord in prayer and earnestly asking Him to guide us through the passage in question. God’s part of the bargain is that He will deliver using us as His receptacle.

174 I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.

As Christians we pray to God for a multitude of things that God answers, but sometimes we miss the opportunity because we are looking the other way. David longed for the salvation of God but is astute enough to put it together with the
statement that the law is his delight. God’s law tells us all how we might be saved. However, many Christians ask but do not wait for a response and they miss an opportunity for someone we desperately want to be saved. When Noah received the call from God to build an ark because He intended to bring a flood, he didn’t wait until he saw the first signs of heavy rain before starting to build but got on with the job confident in the fact that if God had called, he must obey. “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7). The writer to the Hebrews also speaks of Abel (11:4), of Enoch (11:5), of Abraham (11:8-17), of Isaac (11:18-19), of Jacob (11:20-21), of Joseph (11:22) and of Moses (11:23-29). All of them exercised great faith in doing exactly what God had told them without seeing proof. Of course, there were those around them who refused to believe without signs but these people were in awe of their God. “Faith” we are told, “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). In the Christian, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). David longs for God’s salvation for the present from the guilt and power of sin and for the future, when we shall spend eternity with God in heaven.

175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

David’s plea to God was that his soul might be alive in Him. It should be ours as well. I have known of one or two Christians over the years who se lack of joy is so immense that I have begun to wonder whether they are truly saved at all. Our life should be full of joy and wonder because as we study the Scriptures we get a taste of what awaits us in heaven and it is truly joyous. How can we not be excited at the prospect of spending eternity with God? It should, as David says, make us want to praise God because His judgments decree that we will be saved. When He sifts the wheat from the tares, we will be with the wheat. When He sorts the sheep from the goats, we will be with the sheep. No matter what analogy we use, we will be saved and spend eternity with the One who gave His life for us. David’s whole life was one of praise and worship of Almighty God; of reading and studying God’s Word; of praying at every opportunity. It puts us to shame as Christians that we spend so little time in our Saviour’s presence.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

David knew all about sheep for after all, he was a shepherd in his youth who fought to keep the sheep under his control safe. Now he refers to himself as a lost sheep who has gone astray. Centuries before Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, David already knew the answer. Jesus said that if you had a hundred sheep and one went missing, would we not leave the ninety nine and go and look for the one who had been lost? David’s answer to the conundrum here in this final verse saw him asking God to seek him out as he would be a lost sheep. However he did add in that he does not forget His commandments. Sheep on the other hand are known to be a little short of the grey matter and will follow anyone who appears to know where they are going. David knew his frailties as a human being and that is why he acknowledges that he has gone astray. We are all apt to wander, sometimes far
from home, but God oversees our lives, watches out for us and if needs be, He takes our hand and leads us gently home. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-29). Try as he might, and believe me that Satan will try to take you from God, he cannot because he too is a created being, far inferior to God and therefore his power is limited. We have that assurance that God is the ultimate power in the Universe and none can pluck us out of his hand.
CONCLUSION

Psalm 119 is a long Psalm but one worth reading and studying. Thankfully David broke it down into twenty two stanzas in order to make life somewhat easier for us. While many commentators have seen this Psalm as twenty two disconnected writings of eight verses each, I believe that throughout, David has maintained integrity by:

1. Opening his heart for all to see.
2. Showing unequivocally that God never changes.
3. Showing that salvation comes from God alone and that by grace and not by works.
4. Showing that His law, His statutes, His commandments and His precepts are unchanging and we should desire to read, study and understand them with God’s help.
5. Showing that no matter what our enemies may throw at us or put in our way as obstacles, God can and will overcome them.
6. All we like sheep have gone astray but God will seek us out, He will find us and He will lead us home.
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