

MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE NOURISHES THE HEART Psalm 119:11

INTRODUCTION:

Our older daughter, Cherish, was born with a ventricular septal defect: a hole in the wall between the two lower chambers of her heart. It was corrected when she was four years old. A surgeon sewed a Teflon patch onto the septum to cover the hole. It was tough to hand our little girl over to a doctor so he could operate on her heart. We knew that they would anesthetize her and there are always risks with anesthesia. We knew they would slice open the skin on her chest from just below her throat to just above her belly – and that we would never again see her body without a large ugly scar. We knew that they would saw through her sternum and spread her ribs so they could take her heart out of her chest. We knew that the medical team would connect her to a heart-lung machine and then stop her heartbeat. We knew they would cut her now stilled heart open and sew on the patch before reversing all of those steps to put her back together. We knew they would have to give her a large jolt of electricity in an effort to restart her heart. We knew there were many risks that something could go wrong and we could lose her. But we were assured that all of this was necessary to repair her heart and save her life for without the surgery she would certainly die within a very few years.

Parents will take drastic action, if it is necessary, to save the lives of their children. People will take drastic action, if it is necessary, to save their own lives, too – including open-heart surgery if that is what is required to correct a heart defect.

Do you realize that you have a heart defect? You do. You, too, have a hole in your heart that only God can repair. Psalm 119:11 gives the cure for the hole that is in your heart...and in mine. There, within the longest chapter in the Bible, the psalmist writes:

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

The psalmist demonstrated a willingness to take decisive action to save his life by correcting his heart defect.

I. **The Best Prescription** (*Your Word*)

My wife's father says he gets up every morning and takes all of his pills and then, if he's still hungry, he has breakfast. I've heard others say something similar to indicate that they have lots of medicines they are expected to take.

I can tell you from our experience that medicine can be very expensive. A few years ago, Sandy was fighting nausea and she had been prescribed

Zofran. Our daughter, Jan, was visiting with us and offered to pick up her Mom's medicine while she was in town. I wrote out a check to the drug store and signed it so all she would have to do is fill in the amount. Sandy warned her that Zofran was an expensive drug but she should just fill in the check and bring home the medicine. But when she was told the amount to write on the check, she couldn't believe it and called home to make absolutely sure we wanted her to get the pills. We assured her we needed the prescription...even though it was over \$375 for just 10 capsules. (Later, the doctor asked if the Zofran was helping Sandy's nausea and I told him she was better but those pills were making me sick!)

Why would we spend so very much money on 10 pills? Because we knew that's what Sandy needed to treat what was wrong with her.

God's Word is His prescription for the sin-sickness of the world...and the sin-sickness of my heart...and of yours. In Psalm 107, the Bible says:

¹⁷ *Some became fools through their rebellious ways
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.*

¹⁸ *They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.*

¹⁹ *Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.*

²⁰ *He sent forth his word and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave.*

Some of us are sin-sick because of choices we have made. Others are sin-sick because they have been affected by the decisions of others. Still others suffer simply because we live in a fallen world where, when Satan attacks, he goes for the heart. But as the singer of the song put it, "[God] sent forth His word and healed them." And I want you to know, His Word will heal your heart, too. God's Word is the best prescription to heal your heart from the sickness of sin.

II. **The Best Procedure** (*I have hidden*)

God's Word is the best prescription and the best procedure is to hide it – that is, to ingest it.

I can be a little bit naughty sometimes. My doctor once directed me to take fish-oil capsules to help control my cholesterol without medicine. I was to take two capsules three times a day. The next time I went back to the doctor, he was out and his physician's assistant saw me. She looked at my chart and saw I was to be taking fish oil capsules. She asked if I was doing so and I said I was. I paused for a beat and then asked, "Hey, was I supposed to be taking those by mouth?" She looked shocked and said, "Yes! How have you been taking them?" I stuttered a bit and said kind of sheepishly, "By mouth" (as if I were trying to hide the truth about

how I'd been taking the capsules). She asked again, "No, seriously, have you been taking them by mouth?" And I assured her I had.

After she was finished taking my vitals, I was to stop by the front desk to drop off my chart and when I did, she was there. "Really. Were you really taking those pills by mouth?" I tried to reassure her that I was. I finished at the front desk and walked through the waiting room to the front door when I felt a hand on my shoulder and she asked me one more time, "Tell me the truth...what were you doing with those capsules?" And for the third time I promised her I had been taking them by mouth. But I don't think she ever believed me.

The right prescription must be taken in the right way. Read the label and follow the instructions. If it says it is to be taken with food, eat some food when you take the pill. If it says to take it at bedtime, take it at bedtime. If it says to take one pill three times a day, swallow the pill, cough it back up and swallow it again, cough it up and swallow it a third time: take one pill three times a day just like it says.

The right medicine will not have the right effect unless you take it the right way. The best prescription for your heart is God's Word and the best procedure is to hide it...to take it in.

III. **In The Best Place** (*In my heart*)

And the best place to hide God's Word is in your heart. For the Hebrews, the heart was more than just a muscle that pumped blood through the body: it was the center of their being and the totality of who they were.

That is exactly the way we use the word, too. We talk about the American soccer team and we say that the players put their whole heart into the game. We do not mean that they took the muscle out of their bodies and threw it out onto the field. We mean that they gave the game all of their energy, all of their might, all of their spirit and all of their soul.

When a lover leaves you, you might say she broke your heart. A cardiologist would probably declare you perfectly healthy because the organ that pumps your blood is just fine. But your spirit is broken, your soul is wounded and your energy is drained.

We, like the Hebrews, use the term heart to refer to the inner self. And that's where God's Word needs to be hidden. We need God's Word deep inside where we think; deep inside where we feel; deep inside where we react; deep inside where we respond.

I have messages hidden deep inside of me. And so do you. Growing up, I had a brother who told me I was able to be anything I wanted to be and

that stuck with me. But I also had those who told me I was lazy and that I'd never amount to anything. Those messages lodge deep inside a person and at times I can still hear them. No amount of hard work has ever silenced those messages.

I do not want to derive my sense of self or my sense of worth from what other people said 50 years ago. I want to go to the manufacturer's manual and see what He said. He said I was made in His image. He said I was fearfully and wonderfully made. He said He loved me and gave His son to redeem me. I may never be able to silence the voices of criticism from my past but I can drown them out with the voice of my Heavenly Father. And I can do that by hiding His Word in my heart. That is the best prescription, the best procedure and the best place.

IV. For The Best Purpose (*That I might not sin against You*)

And it is for the best purpose.

In the field of medicine, the term "indication" has a particular meaning. "Indication" is the valid reason for any treatment to be administered. The doctor has a purpose for prescribing a given medicine. He has an objective he wants to achieve. Maybe it is to lower blood pressure or blood sugar level. Maybe it is to regulate the heart rhythm or the breathing rate. Maybe it is to fight an infection or fight depression. There is always a reason why a prescription is written and an outcome that is desired.

The Psalmist said that he had hidden God's Word in his heart in order that he would not sin against God. This prescription is preventive in nature. It is intended to be used to keep our hearts from leading us into sin.

In Greek mythology, the Sirens were three dangerous creatures that were half bird and half woman. They were portrayed as seductresses who lured nearby sailors with their enchanting music and voices to shipwreck on the rocky coast of their island. The term "siren song" has nothing to do with the sound of a squad car; it refers to the enchanting seductive song of the Sirens who are so charming but who intend to captivate so they can destroy.

Satan tempts us with his siren song. Friend, when the voices of temptation sing their siren song, we need to have so filled our hearts with God's Word that we scarcely hear the sounds of Satan. There should be so much of God's Word hidden in our hearts that it bubbles to the surface any time we need direction, any time we need comfort, any time we need perspective or strength or hope or assurance. God's Word will keep you from sin if you have hid it in your heart.

Captain James E. Ray of the U.S. Air Force learned just how important those old, familiar words of Scripture were when he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton" and other camps. In his memoir, *The Secret of Our Survival: A Former Vietnam POW's Story of Faith*, Captain Ray recounts a clandestine conversation he had with the prisoner in the next cell, who one day asked:

"Do you know any Bible verses?"

"Well, the Lord's Prayer," I answered.

"Everyone knows that. How about the twenty-third Psalm?"

"Only a little."

I began whispering it. He'd repeat each line after me. A little later he whispered the entire Psalm back to me...Other prisoners joined in, sharing verses they knew. Through these contacts a fellowship grew among us. I didn't feel so alone any more...[O]ur common denominators were the Bible and Jesus Christ, and we were able to share and write down a great deal of Scripture. For by now it had become vital to our daily existence. Often racked with dysentery, weakened by the diet of rice and thin cabbage and pumpkin soup, our physical bodies had shrunk within the prison walls. We spent 20 hours a day locked in our cells. And those Bible verses became rays of light, constant assurances of His Love and care.

Since the guards forbade communication between prisoners, they found creative ways of sharing these verses with each other:

[T]he urge to share these verses with others developed inventiveness.

One night I lay with my ear pressed against the rough wooden wall of my cell to hear Thump...thumpety thump as somewhere on the wall, cells away, a fellow POW tapped out in Morse code: "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Psalm 121:1). He tapped out his name-Russ Temperly-and passed on the seven other verses in that Psalm, which I scratched on the concrete floor with a piece of broken tile.

"My help cometh from the Lord," the Psalm assured us, and with that assurance came His Presence, soothing us, telling us to fear not... From that we learned a most important lesson: Bible verses on paper aren't one iota as useful as Scripture burned into your mind and heart where you can draw on them for guidance and comfort.

By the end of several months, Captain Ray writes that he and his fellow prisoners were able to "memorize collectively the Sermon on the Mount, Romans 12, First Corinthians 13, and many of the Psalms. Now we had our own 'living Bible,' walking around the room."

CONCLUSION:

I do not know if you will ever have exactly the same need to have God's Word hidden in your heart that Captain James Ray had but I do know you need to have God's Word hidden in your heart. So I want to give you a very practical method for memorizing Scripture. You absolutely can do it.

Take a 3 X 5 file card and write out a portion of Scripture that you want to memorize. Put it in your pocket and keep it with you. Several times throughout the day, take it out and read it. When you are alone, read it out loud. When you are in the presence of others, read it silently but read it...10, 15, 20 times in the course of the day. Read it again when you lie down to sleep and then as you wait to fall asleep, think through those words again. Soon you will have that passage memorized and you can move on to another one. Before long, you will have many verses committed to memory – verses you can call to mind when you are tempted, when you are discouraged, when you are rejoicing, when you are weary. In any and all circumstances of life, you will be able to recall God's Word on the subject.

And best of all, you will have the best prescription with the best procedure in the best place for the best purpose: that you might not sin against God.

To help you get started, I've printed up your first file card. I'm going to ask for about four people to help distribute these. I want everyone to take one. Do not leave it in the pew! When you get it, read it, put it in your pocket and then refer to it often. It may be that by tomorrow morning, you'll need to write down a different Scripture so you can memorize another one. But you can do it. You can memorize Scripture. And you should...you must...because memorizing scripture nourishes the heart.

In Proverbs 4:20-23, Solomon wrote great advice to his son:

²⁰ *My son, pay attention to what I say;*

listen closely to my words.

²¹ *Do not let them out of your sight,*

keep them within your heart;

²² *for they are life to those who find them
and health to a man's whole body.*

²³ *Above all else, guard your heart,
for it is the wellspring of life.*

Because the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart, how we fill our heart is the most important decision we will ever make. I implore you to make the best choice.

INVITATION: #184 – “Thy Word”