

Pause with Pastor

March 12, 2021

Encouragement from the Psalms

Bret Rhoades

Psalm 119:9-16

- 9. How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.*
- 10. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.*
- 11. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*
- 12. Praise be to you O Lord; teach me your decrees.*
- 13. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.*
- 14. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.*
- 15. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.*
- 16. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.*

Verse 9 asks a very important question; how can we keep our way pure? And the answer in simplistic terms is to live our lives according to God's word.

OK, that is much easier said than done. So what do we do in real terms? Verse two says to seek God with all our heart. Verse 11 says that if we hide God's word in our heart, we will not sin against him. So in short, if we seek God (through reading His word and worshiping with others) and take these instructions to heart, if we ask our God to teach us (verse 12), then God's word has the ability and the power to both cleanse us from sin, and to have us live our lives according to his word.

Wow!

I am reminded of a contemporary Christian song by Lincoln Brewster entitled *There Is Power*. In part the lyrics are:

*No fear, no lie, Can stand against us now. He is here.
The Word has come, To silence every doubt. He is here
There is power in the name of Jesus.*

That pretty much sums it up. We have access to the word, and through the word we have access to the power that is in the name of Jesus. Praise the Lord!

Now also notice there are some things this Psalm does not say. We cannot, as Frank Sinatra sings, do it "My Way." We cannot follow our Lord half-heartedly and still follow in his paths completely and fully. We cannot read his word out of a sense of duty, and *not* meditate on it, and expect a great result.

There is power in the name of Jesus. There is power in his words. But to not open the Bible and read the words, meditate on them, keep them in our heart – not doing that is like buying a college calculus book and keeping it on your nightstand and expecting to ace the college course. I know. I tried that. It did not work. Twice.

While this may all sound like an awful lot of Law, the Gospel is discretely, but powerfully present. In verse 12 we ask God to teach us his decrees. God's decrees are not only Law; they include the decree of forgiveness to all who trust in Jesus as the one who fully atones for their sins. God's decrees also include sending the Holy Spirit to fill us with the desire to read, learn, and inwardly digest God's Word. The Holy Spirit is the source of our desire and ability to do all that we profess to do in this Psalm.

Heavenly father, we are thankful that you have placed us in a land where we are free to worship you, free to openly read your word and practice our faith. We ask that you continue to bless us and encourage us to read and meditate on your word. And lastly, we pray that you bring an end to the pandemic so that we may gather once again in your house, together, praising your name. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Worship on Sunday, March 21, 10:30AM

Online only, distributing The Lord's Supper in the parking lot (weather permitting) at 11:30!

With a forecast of wind and a significant chance of showers, we will broadcast our worship service from inside the Sanctuary with only our production staff present. *However, please read to the end to learn of our Sanctuary reopening plans.*

Since we will not be on the lawn, we will not need our outdoor setup crew. We will need the following tech assistants:

- Saturday prep – Hank & Caroline Twentier
- Video – Fred Reimer
- Audio – Don Piel

On Moving Indoors

20 surveys were returned representing the preferences of 30 people. While this is not a large sampling, it is what we have to work with. Our survey responses reveal that 20 individuals are ready to return to worship in the Sanctuary. This is a majority of those who completed the survey. Another 10 will remain outside for the time being.

The following guidelines and procedures will be observed as we reopen the Sanctuary:

- **Limited Seating:** We will limit indoor seating to 40 persons in the Sanctuary (plus Pastor, elders, ushers, musician, tech assistants) with 6 feet between family unit clusters.
- **Masks:** Everyone will be required to wear a facemask at all times inside the building. If you do not own one or accidentally left it at home, we will have a limited supply of single-use masks available for you. (Pastor will remove his mask while leading worship for broadcast clarity. He received his second vaccination on March 11.)
- **Social Distancing:** Avoid close contact with others. Continue to practice social distancing with anyone outside your household. Seating in the sanctuary will also observe social distancing guidelines.
 - For further protection, we have added an air purification system in each of the building's three air handlers. These only clean the air as it passes through the fan. This provides a cleaning of the air over a period of time as the air is exchanged in the room. It does not clean the air as it passes from one person to another, seated 6 feet apart.
- **Traffic Flow:** Please enter the front main doors and into the sanctuary. At the conclusion of the service, families will be ushered row by row starting from the back. If you desire to visit with someone, do so outside the building on the front lawn, maintaining the proper distance.
- **Hygiene:** Frequent hand washing is encouraged. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer will also be available. Cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue or elbow.
- **Worship:** No sharing of the peace. No children's message. No passing of the offering plates. They will be available at the front entrance for you to drop-off your offering to the Lord.
- **Restrooms:** It is advised that only one family at a time use the restrooms, if possible. Be sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- **Restricted Areas:** Certain parts of the building will be closed off, such as: the Fellowship Hall, kitchen, and preschool area, except for necessary Sunday morning tasks.
- **Communion:** Communicants inside the building commune in a procession, remaining standing, and maintaining 6 feet between family units while standing in line. Communicants on the lawn and in their cars will be communed at their location, as we have done in the past.
- **Fellowship Time:** No coffee or refreshments will be offered. If you wish to socialize with someone, please do so after the service outside on the front lawn.

Other Considerations Involved in Reopening Our Sanctuary

We have planned for Confirmation to occur in our worship service on Palm Sunday, March 21st. This was scheduled weeks ago, before we had an anticipated reopening date. Our confirmation families are among the younger people who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated. Faced with the possibility of moving indoors because of weather, we determined that the confirmation families could worship in the Sanctuary – with only sponsor families in addition – if that became necessary. This would ensure everyone’s safety as much as possible. This needs to be considered as we schedule our reopening. (This is how we conducted a baptism last year.)

We also need to acquire some additional cables and design a plan for bringing the music and voices from our indoor sound system to the lawn.

A signup page has been created on our website (access from our home page) for each service which will be open in the Sanctuary. Only the first 40 individuals to register will be admitted into the Sanctuary. (If you do not have internet access, you may register by calling the church office.). Please note that Sanctuary seating will be reserved for those who have made reservations. Overflow, as well as those who are not yet ready to worship in the Sanctuary, are invited to sit on the lawn. We will have our outdoor speakers in place. Worshipers may listen to the live sound while viewing on their personal device. (It may be possible to view the worship from the front lawn by positioning your chair to see through the front window.)

Our Reopening Schedule

Sunday, March 21st, 10:30 – Online only (as announced above) with parking lot distribution if weather permits.

Wednesday, March 24th, 7:00 – Online only.

Palm Sunday, March 28th, 10:30 – On the lawn (weather permitting, with FM88:1 for the parking lot). If weather prevents outdoor worship, worship will be online only, with only the confirmation families and sponsors indoors. Communion distribution in the parking lot will depend on the weather.

Maundy Thursday, April 1st, 7:00 – In the Sanctuary, with Communion, open to those who have registered, and online.

Good Friday, April 2nd, 7:00 – In the Sanctuary, open to those who have registered, and online.

Easter Sunday, April 4th, 8:00 & 10:30 – The 8:00 service will be in the Sanctuary only, with communion, with all applicable restrictions. It will not be online, nor on the lawn. The 10:30 service will be in the Sanctuary, open to those who have registered, on the lawn, (weather permitting, with FM88:1 for the parking lot) with communion for all in attendance (Sanctuary, lawn, and parking lot), and online.

In the Meantime, for Private Devotion in the Sanctuary

Our opportunity for private devotion time will continue as follows:

Some of our members have noted that, since we are not able to worship in the Sanctuary they would like to be able to come to the Sanctuary for a time of private devotion. To accommodate this desire, the Sanctuary will be available for personal devotion time on Monday 3:30PM – 5:00PM and Wednesday 1:30PM – 3:00PM. An Elder will be present so no key or keycode is required to enter the building.

I look forward to the time when we can all gather in the Sanctuary. Until then, I hope to see you in one of the various settings that will be available.

In His service,

Pastor Panning