

Introduction

People of God, one of my seminary professors, only part-jokingly once said: "I don't believe a person can be saved if they haven't read *The Pilgrim's Progress*."

The Pilgrim's Progress, written in 1678 by John Bunyan, is a powerful allegory of the Christian life. It tells the journey of a man named Christian who, after reading about the coming judgment, is burdened by the weight of his sins. He flees his hometown, the City of Destruction, and sets out for the Celestial City, guided by Evangelist.

Along the way, he faces trials like the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He meets a number of godly companions like Faithful and Hopeful but also dangerous adversaries like Apollyon and Giant Despair.

This story vividly illustrates the believer's journey of faith, the struggles along the way, and the ultimate victory of reaching the Celestial City through perseverance and trust in God.

Early on in Christian's journey, he comes to a narrow gate with the words from Matthew 7:7 inscribed above it: "Knock, and it shall be opened to you." After knocking, Christian is greeted by Goodwill, who opens the door and quickly pulls him aside. When Christian asks why he was pulled so suddenly, Goodwill explains, "A little distance from this gate is a strong castle, of which Beelzebub is captain. He and his minions shoot arrows at those who approach the gate, hoping they will die before entering."

Goodwill then directs Christian on his way, commanding him to follow the narrow path, saying:

“Look before you; do you see this narrow way? That is the way you must go. It was built by the patriarchs, prophets, Christ, and his apostles. It is as straight as a rule can make it. But there are many crooked and wide paths that lead away from it. The right path is the narrow one.”

The Lord Jesus told us this very thing; that the Christian life a journey on the narrow way, saying:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. But the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” – Matthew 7:13-14

We must therefore be on our guard, people of God, for the path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. These temptations and dangers are both external and internal: the pleasures of sin, the allure of ease, and the false promises of the world will tempt us to stray from the path, exchanging a life of faithful perseverance for fleeting, empty joys that lead to hell.

How can we guard ourselves against these temptations while we are on the way to the Celestial City?

Today we are going to look at one small section of the Word of God to help guides us on the journey. Psalm 119:9-16 emphasizes three key principles, about how we can keep our way pure:

- 1. Guard God’s Word in your heart**
- 2. Speak God’s Word with your lips**
- 3. Delight in God’s Word more than riches**

By applying these truths, we not only cleanse our way, making it pure, but we also find true joy in our walk with God to the Celestial City.

1. Guard God's Word in Your Heart

Psalm 119:9 asks, "*How can a young man cleanse his way (or keep his way pure)?*" This vital question is directed primarily to **young men**, because they carry great responsibility on their shoulders. They are the future of their families, the church, and society. The enemy therefore will do everything in its power to trip up young men. For if he weakens them, he destroys the leadership of generations to come.

This is why the apostle John writes in 1 John 2:13-14:

"I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

The Devil will stop at nothing to eliminate the strength and vitality of young men, particularly by trying to get you to give your strength to the strange woman, Dame Folly.

King Solomon said, "*I perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.*" (Prov. 7:7-9)

The Devil will use the lust of your flesh, the lust of your eyes, and the pride of life to lure you away and makes you weak and impure. He is constantly on the attack, shooting his fiery arrows at you, young men, hoping to ensnare you early in your journey. Beware of fiery darts, and quench them with the shield of faith.

How then do young men keep their way pure, “*by guarding it according to your word*” (Psalm 119:9). To guard your way is to stand watch, to be vigilant, being always on the alert, watching for the dangers that can lead us astray.

Bilbo Baggin’s said,

“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.” He of course was just talking about an adventure, but the truth of his words remain the same when it comes to sin. If you don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.

To remain on the narrow path, God’s Word must be our guide. Thus the Psalmist later says, *Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.* He says, *the wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.*

The Puritan Thomas Watson once said:

“The Scriptures are the chart and compass by which we sail to the New Jerusalem.” Therefore we must guard our way according to this Word.

Wholehearted Pursuit of God

The rest of this section of the Psalm are an explanation of *how* we guard our way according to God’s Word. We are told that we must guard our way according to God’s word, and so the Psalmist then tells us how we guard our way.

The first step is **to pursue God with all our heart.**

Psalm 119:10 says, *“With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!”*

There is no room for half-hearted Christians on the pilgrim’s journey. We cannot be like Pliable, who only started off on the journey, but once he fell into the Slough of Despond quickly retreated back to the City of Destruction.

To keep our way pure, to reach the Heavenly Jerusalem, God and His Word cannot be a casual side hobby. We cannot treat the Bible like any other book that collects dust on our shelves. The pursuit of God requires our full devotion, focus, and intentionality, and a life which is spent pursuing God in His Word.

Wholehearted pursuit of God is a repeated emphasis in Scripture, and with it is a great and precious promise: *“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* (Jeremiah 29:13).

By seeking God with all our heart, we leave no room for wandering from His commands and from the Narrow path of faith. Only full-hearted love Christ and His cross guards our feet upon the path. For he who has been forgiven much, loves much. And therefore let us never forget that love for God is only counted where there is love for Christ and for the forgiveness he has purchased for us on the blessed tree.

Storing Up God's Word in Our Hearts

Psalm 119:11 says, *“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”*

Storing up God's Word is an excellent way to guard your way. Storing up His word means more than collecting Bibles.

When we store up God's Word, it becomes a powerful defense against sin. Our Master Jesus, during His time of temptation in the wilderness, responded to each of Satan's temptations with Scripture saying, *It is written*.

He did not rely on human reasoning or willpower alone; He relied on the stored-up Word of God to fight off the enemy's schemes.

Likewise, if we are to be prepared to resist temptation and walk in righteousness, we must stockpile God's Word in our hearts, fashioning our hearts as an armory of Scripture. We are ready for every enemy with verses locked and loaded ready to attack all sin and unbelief in our hearts.

Are your heart is hounded by Guilt – 1 John 1:9 – *If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Are you in need of courage? Ps. 27:17 – *Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.*

Fearful? – Luke 12:32 – *Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

Need assurance of God's Love? – 1 John 4:10 – *Here is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Overwhelmed with lust? – 2 Tim. 2:22 - ²⁰*But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²²Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue*

righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

The more we fill up the armory of our hearts with the Word, the less room there is for sin to take root, and the more weapons we have to fight against sin.

2. Speak the Word with Your Lips (vv. 12-13)

Next, we find that what we store in our hearts will naturally overflow from our lips. As the psalmist fills his heart with God's Word, it leads him to declare God's truths, both in praise and proclamation.

Psalm 119:12-13 says:

"Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!

A heart saturated with the Word of God is filled to overflowing with God's praise. But it also longs for more of His truth, more of His guidance, more understanding of His ways. The psalmist expresses this longing when he cries out, *"Teach me your statutes!"* The Christian life is a continual cycle of receiving the Word, being filled by it, praising God for it, and then desiring to learn even more.

Declaring His Truths

In verse 13, the psalmist moves from personal devotion and praise to public declaration: *"With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth."* We are called to do share God's word with others – proclaiming God's truth in our homes, workplaces, and

communities. When God's Word fills our hearts, it naturally overflows in our speech.

Because faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ, Christians should speak about the Gospel of Christ and His grace, and encourage others with His Word. However, the world will try to silence us. People may "cancel" us for standing firm on what the Bible says.

The apostle Paul endured persecution for preaching, but he never stopped proclaiming the Gospel.

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

His example reminds us that if the gospel was worth Christ dying for, it's worth us speaking about, and boldly even in the face of opposition. As Peter and John say, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:19)

Jeremiah's Fire

Consider also the prophet Jeremiah. He faced severe persecution for preaching the truth, and at one point, he grew so weary of the attacks that he thought about quitting. In Jeremiah 20:9, he said:

"I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name."

But Jeremiah couldn't remain silent. He continued: *"But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not."*

This powerful image of God's Word burning within Jeremiah illustrates the truth that when God's Word fills our hearts, it becomes impossible to suppress. Even when we feel overwhelmed by opposition, the Word will compel us to speak. It's as if the truth of God catches fire in our bones, and we cannot help but declare it.

And let me just say to any young men out there, if you find that you have this fire within you, God might be calling you to the Ministry of the Word.

3. Delight in the Word More Than Riches (vv. 14-16)

The psalmist not only stores God's Word in his heart and speaks it, but also finds deep joy in it—greater than any earthly riches or pleasures. As he says in verse 14: *"I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches."*

The rich young ruler followed God's commandments from his youth, but when our Lord Jesus commanded him to give up his wealth and follow Him, he walked away sorrowful. His love for possessions blinded him to the eternal riches Jesus offered. This serves as a warning to us: earthly wealth and pleasures can lure us away from the path to true riches in the Celestial City.

Jesus warned of the deceitfulness of riches, saying, *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:24).

The Lord also Jesus also warns in Luke 12:15, saying: *“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”*

We must guard our hearts, for worldly riches will entangle us in the snares of Vanity Fair, where Beelzebub serves up temptations daily, and countless souls are led astray. We must recall that our Lord Jesus taught us that riches are fleeting and deceptive, promising much but delivering little.

The True Riches of God's Word

In Psalm 119:14, the psalmist says, *“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches,”* valuing God's Word above worldly wealth. We, too, are called to treasure God's Word as our greatest source of joy and delight.

King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, wrote in Proverbs 3:14-15 that the profit we gain from God’s wisdom is better than silver, and its yield is greater than fine gold. He declared that wisdom is more precious than jewels, and nothing can compare to it. David echoes this sentiment in Psalm 19:10, where he says God’s Word is more desirable than gold, even much fine gold.

People of God, the more we delight in God’s Word as being greater wealth than all the riches of the world, the less the temptations to covet earthly riches will lead astray from narrow path.

This is not to say that earthly riches are evil. It is the heart of man that is evil, and it is man’s *love* of money that leads to all kinds of

evil. Thus, it takes a special man whose heart is so fully set on His God to not be led astray by deceitfulness of riches.

The man who puts more emphasis on earthly riches than he does heavenly treasure, will find that he invested in the wrong commodity. Only the treasures of God's Word last forever. The instructions, guidance, commands, and promises found in Scripture are treasures that we can store up for eternity.

Therefore, let us store up treasures in heaven, delighting in God's Word above all earthly riches.

Meditation on God's Word

The psalmist shows us how to deepen our delight in God's Word: "*I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways*" (Psalm 119:15). Meditation on Scripture requires slowing down, reading with purpose, and reflecting deeply on its meaning and application.

Biblical Meditation is not a rushed activity but a focused, intentional engagement with God's Word and His Holy Spirit. The Ancient Practice which is known as *Lectio Divina* - Divine Reading - is extremely helpful. There are a number of ways to describe this, but I like using the acronym SWORD.

1. S - Scripture

- Begin by reading a passage from Scripture, selecting a short portion to focus on. Read slowly, attentively, and perhaps more than once. You're not rushing, but allowing the words

to sink in, aiming to hear what God is saying through the passage.

2. W – Wait

- After reading, enter a posture of waiting in silence. Instead of immediately analyzing or interpreting the text, wait in God's presence. Allow the words to settle in your mind and heart, listening for God's Spirit to bring any phrases, thoughts, or images that stand out. This stage encourages patience as you let the Scripture stir your heart.

3. O – Observe

- Now, observe the passage with greater attention to detail. Ask yourself, "What is God saying to me personally through this text?" Look at specific words or phrases that resonate. Consider their meaning and how they apply to your life. This is a time for deeper observation and reflection on what you're learning spiritually. It helps to journal your thoughts during this time.

4. R – Request

- After reflecting on the passage, respond to God through prayer. Make requests based on what you've observed. Ask for understanding, wisdom, or strength to apply the Scripture to your life. This is your opportunity to dialogue with God, seeking His help, guidance, or thanking Him for the insights He's revealed through His Word.

5. D – Dedicate

- Finally, Dedicate yourself to live out what you've learned. In this stage, it's more about silent surrender and contemplation—allowing God's Word to transform your heart, showing you how and where you can apply this teaching in your own life. Here, you commit to living out His Word, dedicating your actions and thoughts to following His will.

The **S.W.O.R.D.** acronym captures the essence of Lectio Divina by focusing on Scripture, patience, reflection, prayer, and devotion. It serves as a practical tool for daily devotions, helping you remember the steps to engage meaningfully with God's Word.

Committing God's Word to Memory

The psalmist concludes this section by expressing his commitment to remembering God's Word:

"I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (Psalm 119:16).

To commit God's Word to memory requires constant attention, regular study, and a deliberate effort to keep it central in our lives. It's not something that happens by accident, it requires discipline.

One of the best ways to memorize Scripture is through repetition or setting it to music. Many of us can still recall songs we learned in our teenage years because music helps embed words in our memory. In the same way, putting Scripture to music or reciting it regularly helps us internalize it.

Think for a moment about something you've memorized—a poem, a song, or a favorite movie quote. Now consider this: If we've managed to memorize the lyrics to songs or movie quotes, how much more should we value and memorize the living and active Word of God?

The Word of God is far more beneficial to our lives than any pop song or famous line. When we realize the practical and spiritual benefits of memorizing Scripture, it becomes a source of delight. And as we commit to remembering His Word, we find that it stays with us, ready to guide us at a moment's notice.

Conclusion

As we journey toward the Celestial City, we must keep our way pure by guarding our hearts with God's Word. Psalm 119:9-16 provides clear steps in how to do that: seek God with all our hearts, store up His Word in our hearts, praise the Lord for His word and desire to learn His statutes, proclaim His Word boldly, delight in it more than all riches, meditate on it and memorize it. This will help you to keep your way pure on the Narrow Way, as you make your Pilgrimage to the Celestial City. Amen.