

Psalm 119:9 - 11

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[0 : 00] Let us turn to Psalm 119 and to the verses we were considering last Lord's Day evening.

Verse 9 and verse 11. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word?

Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee. Now last Sunday night, with the emphasis thrown heavily on the place that the word of God has as our ultimate guide, we were taking stock of the dangers particularly of wishful thinking and of seeking the easiest way out in our search for the Lord's plan and purpose for our lives.

Now one commentator that I consulted has pointed to another danger in this general area, which I must confess didn't occur to myself, but the more I think about it, the more I feel that it is most worthy of special notice.

He calls it the peril in the realm of finding or seeking guidance that is, he calls it the peril of romantic daydreaming.

[1 : 55] And he sees this as a practice which, whether we're looking for the Lord's will on our careers or on our general Christian service or on courtship for that matter, or anything else can make, you might say, utter nonsense of our search for guidance.

And the instance is a young civil servant who felt a strong urge to go to the foreign mission field.

Although to all of his friends, the apparent call belonged almost certainly to the realm of his romantic daydreams.

Now it would seem that each and every time that this young man was taken to task by his boss for some inferior or slipshod piece of work, he saw himself under the palm trees in some land beyond the sea, carrying out the positive Christian service for Christ as master of his very own mission station.

And his call to missionary work functioned, it would seem, in fact, as a sort of compensation, as a sort of antidote to his immediate problems.

[3 : 48] Well, of course, you can see that this belongs to the escape route mentality or psychology, which we were discussing last Lord's Day evening, and which is such a threat to our conception of how the Lord guides his people.

Such a threat to the practical way in which we discern his guidance for us in any particular instance. Each problem, in this way you see, each problem, every occurrence of difficulty or pressure, frustration, dissatisfaction in connection with the business we are now at, becomes the trigger for our mentally running away from the drudgery and the pain of the present, and finding relief in the realm of daydreams.

Now, I think that the young man concerned was forgetting at least two things. First of all, that the time of need and pressure and difficulty is not given to us by God in order that we should run away from it, but rather that we should, in dependence upon his strength, obtain the victory.

The writer to the Hebrews says that you've got trouble. Yes, well, there's a throne of grace to which, because Jesus is our great high priest, we may and we ought to come, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in every time of need.

And I think that the temptation to fly from the difficulties of the present can take us in a very acute form when there is ridicule or persecution, when there's a cold-shouldering reaction to our Christian position as it emerges in our work, either by what we say or do or by what we abstain from saying or doing.

[6 : 04] And then the mentality emerges, oh, that I, like a dove, had wings, then would I fly far hence and be at rest.

Or I would high me somewhere else where the spiritual atmosphere would be more accommodating, more responsive to my Christian witness.

Now, what is forgotten here is that it's no use ever thinking that we'll discover an environment, if we are out and out Christians, where our Christian witness would be totally acceptable.

all these, says Paul, that live godly in Christ Jesus shall, must, suffer persecution. And it is forgotten, moreover, that there are special promises made to Christians for the time of persecution.

There is no temptation taking you, says Paul, but such as is common to men, no trial. But such as is common to men.

[7 : 18] And God, who is faithful, will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but will, with the temptation, make a way of escape.

Or again, familiar Old Testament scripture in the same vein, fear not their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee. Paul said, you remember, when he was brought before Nero, that although he was forsaken by his fellow Christians to a man, the Lord stood with me, that by me the preaching should be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear.

And then you've got the passage that we read in Hebrews chapter 12, which instructs the Christian to run with perseverance the race set before him, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher, the prince, the pioneer and the finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, didn't run away from it, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.

You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. So that the call is to resist and not to yield in the face of persecution.

Probably this temptation is at its strongest, where we have perhaps been speaking to people who are close to us at home, or possibly close to us in business, and been speaking to them over a period about the way of salvation, and yet they have shown no signs of making a spiritual response.

[9 : 14] And perhaps sometimes we haven't been over discreet about the way in which we have made that witness. And then, of course, we're up to say, oh well, I'll just have to be like Paul, who turned from the Jews to the Gentiles when the Jews refused to listen to the gospel.

Well, I've no doubt at all that Christian men and women must be careful not to waste their shot and their shell on only one target. Jesus went to other cities also, we are told.

And there is certainly such a thing as gospel hardening. We must spread the net as wide as possible, and we mustn't waste all our efforts on that crafty old fish who has eluded many fishermen before now.

But then you see, Paul was an apostle thinking of his decision to turn from the Jews to the Gentiles. He was an apostle who had a special dispensation given to him, you may say, from his very conversion that he would be a preacher, an apostle to the Gentiles.

And I think we've got to be very careful about drawing straight lines from what was a specifically apostolic function in the early church to what is right and what is proper for Christians in general in time to come.

[10 : 47] The emphasis which the Bible lays on patience, on perseverance, on resisting and withstanding in the evil day should itself caution us against flying away as a dove to some romantically conceived persecution-free environment.

Well, there isn't any. Then again, as Peter reminds us in his first epistle, chapter 3, there are other forms of witnessing than merely a non-stop verbal confrontation of people that we are constantly in touch with.

And he gives us an example as to where this must often have operated in the early church, you know, a situation where it would probably be very common, namely where a Christian wife or it could be a Christian husband was becoming puzzled as to how to react towards an unbelieving partner who was refusing persistently to listen to his to her gospel witness.

In the same way, he says, you wives, you Christian wives, be submissive to your own heathen, unbelieving husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be one without the word by the behavior of their wives as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

And then Paul in Ephesians, he brings forward a similar principle in dealing with the Christian slaves and in giving the Christian slaves of Ephesus certain advices where they had to work for and presumably worked in close contact with non-Christian masters.

[12 : 52] And he says, slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh. That's to say, don't run away. And you'll remember that Paul in fact sent Onesimus the runaway slave back to his master Philemon.

Be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ. Not by way of eye service as men pleasers but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart.

With good will render service not grudgingly because you do it as to the Lord and not to men knowing that whatever good thing each one does this he will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free.

That's where there is an often unpleasant and often hostile non-Christian working environment.

The Christian is not to fly away from it merely for that reason. He is to give good service for Christ's sake who wants him to be there and he is to think of his work as being done mainly to his supreme master not the immediate master so much as his supreme master who is Christ and he is assured that the Lord will give real and satisfying compensations.

[14 : 28] So the young man in the story that I've quoted forgot in the first place that pressure and the difficulty and the persecution are not given to the Christian by God so that he should fly from it.

God promises to be with us and he asks us to treat the hostile and the difficult situation as a place in which above all we are serving him.

Now the second thing I think that this young civil servant forgot being frequently and fortunately rather slipshod and careless in some of his work and very properly being brought to task for that by his boss the second thing that he forgot was that it is not the Lord's will to place second rate Christians if I can put it that way Christians who do not take seriously the work they are now at in places of greater and more spiritual responsibility well you remember the words of Jesus in the parable of the talents he that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much well done good and faithful servant thou has been faithful over a few things thou has been reliable over a few things

I will make thee ruler over many things enter thou into the joy of thy Lord now this has brought us round again as you can see to the supreme importance and we're still on these two verses in Psalm 119 as we were last Lord's day the supreme importance of consulting the Bible carefully for any definite rules that it may lay down in moral and spiritual terms as the guidelines for our course of action in any particular situation wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee now this it seems to me is of very special importance over against a tendency which from my reading seems to have had a very considerable vogue among evangelical

Christians namely aiming to find guidance by doing what is called putting out a fleece you may have heard the expression putting out a fleece like Gideon putting out a fleece you remember the story of Gideon he prayed to the Lord and he put this proposition to the Lord that if God was going to save Israel by his hand against the Midianites and the Amalekites and he Gideon would put out a fleece of wool in the floor thrashing floor presumably and there would be dew on the fleece only but it would be dry on the earth all around then if the Lord did that Gideon would take this as an indication of the Lord's mind he would get the victory and so it was and you remember that Gideon was able although the earth was dry all around he was able to wring a whole bowl full of water from the fleece well he wasn't quite satisfied with that indication and he asked the

[18 : 43] Lord to be indulgent towards him he would lay out a fleece again and this time he requested that the fleece might be dry and that the ground round about would be covered with dew and so it was but before we apply Gideon to our own case we must remember certain things I believe first of all Gideon was one of the prophet judges of God in a specifically miracle era of Israel's history and he can serve as no direct pattern for us in this respect another thing Gideon did not have the extensive body of plain scripture rules and principles which we possess and more than not he did not have the wonderful ministry of the spirit's illumination which the

Christian church and all Christian believers are assured of in the gospel and I don't think it's unimportant to mention that Gideon's home background was a center of idolatry and we have no authority it seems to me for resorting to that kind of thing for the regular guidance of our lives it's not to say that the Lord might specially direct one of his people in that way but what I'm saying is that we have no authority for adopting that for the regular guidance of our lives and John White in his interesting book that I referred to last time indicates the sort of thing that is done sometimes today a Christian says he wants a certain item of guidance and he says something like this Lord if you really if you if you really want me to carry out plan A then please make the telephone ring at 9 10 pm sharp and then

I will know that plan A is what you want me to follow now I read elsewhere an interesting example of this which involved a Christian man who was he was praying to the Lord for guidance about buying a new house in a district to which he was just going and he prayed about it of course every Christian would but and after prayer he came to the decision that one specific factor would constitute in this situation God's guidance for him if the building society were to give him a mortgage then he would take that as a sign from the Lord to go ahead with the particular house concerned now it was a very very expensive house the one that he had in mind and his mortgage payments along with his other expenses would have absorbed every item of his available income and the result would be that there would be nothing at all left over for Christian stewardship well the building society did come up with the loan and he proceeded to buy the house but in doing so he moved into a situation where he was utterly incapable of being a faithful

Christian steward to be which Christians are expressly laid under obligation in 2nd Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 and what had happened was this that he had allowed the decision of a secular business enterprise to dominate the course of his Christian life and the point is that often one fears often enough in the life of the church as a body or in the life of individual Christian men and women guidance is claimed for a step which is really a step into spiritual compromise compromise and spiritual compromise is something which the whole of scripture forbids us to get entangled in this was a step into something that contravened the clear teaching of the word of God for

Christians and no method of guidance which does that whoever practices it can possibly be Christian the young believer whom Peter Master tells us about who wanted to enter a Bible college with a view to become a minister he got caught in the very same error about guidance and I think it's quite useful using illustrations to instead of abstract discussion to bring these points out into the open now this young man instead of consulting directly the teaching the principles the rules of scripture about becoming a minister he wrote straight away a letter of application to a particular Bible college and as he closed the envelope and went to the post box he prayed that it would be alright and he prayed like this

[24 : 59] Lord if the Bible college says yes then I will take that as thy sign for me to go ahead but there were two factors which this particular young man did not take into account first of all there was a practical technical matter he did not know at the time that he made his application to the Bible college that the particular Bible college in question did not themselves assume responsibility for judging the suitability of applicants for the ministry you know if you had just the right number of A passes A levels then you were in and to cut this rather sad story short the young man never entered the ministry and in many ways three valuable years of his life were lost but even more important he didn't first consult what the

Bible says about those who are to be chosen for such offices for example the Bible says you mustn't be a novice I well remember when I was asked as a very young Christian to to speak at a kind of fellowship meeting in Dingwall I always remember my colleague Alistair Ross Alistair Ross a clue in Greyfriars and I were put into this together and I well remember my father taking me aside and asking me very nicely he wasn't rough or harsh in any way had I really considered what the Bible said about a new Christian taking part in a service like that when the Bible says not a novice well I thought he was a wee bit fussy at the time but I often thought back on it and I feel that there was more wisdom in his head than there was in mine so here was a young man hardly converted and applying straight away no intervening special preparation study or consulting with anybody straight away to a

Bible college and secondly he didn't consult the Bible as to what it says about particular Christian gifts the Bible says that people who are advanced to church office like this must be up to teach thirdly he had not undertaken any tasks in Christian service nor shown himself reliable therein and the Bible by contrast speaks of faithful and reliable men who shall be able to teach and it says let them first be proved and I think that most significant of all in some ways he did not have the backing of his local church the New Testament says that those who are appointed to the ministry or ministry type tasks must be recommended by the brethren and Peter

Master actually says that the young man didn't even have the support of any of his personal friends and the Bible says that in the multitude of counselors there is safety now that's only one other illustration around our general subject or on our general subject of the danger of adopting a Gideon's fleece attitude to guidance and the wrongness the error of adopting any principle of guidance whatsoever which fails to take account first of all of the plain teaching of the word of God wherewithal shall a young man or an old man cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee let us pray oh lord we bless thee that thy word is able to make us wise unto salvation we have a responsibility to pray to thee about all the things that concern the shape of our life and our courses of conduct and thou hast most graciously said that if any man lack wisdom and he ask of

God who giveth to all men liberally he will be shown the way but lord we know that thou hast given us thy word and that we have to hide thy word in our heart we have to consult its principles and directions and grant that we may test any and every professed system of guidance precisely by the degree to which it consults the direct teaching of holy scripture we ask it in Jesus name amen our concluding psalm is number 126 and the tune den field number 49 psalm 126 the tune den field when science bondage God turned back as men had dreamed were we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody the among the heathen said the lord great things for them hath wrought the lord hath done great things for us whence joy to us is brought the whole of psalm number 126 do so and back and

[32 : 19] Great things forever come to us. The Lord hath done great things for us, with joy to us is not.

Blessings of all that must come, our own needs more be called.

The storm tears are weeping time, for joy and joy we shall.

That the very precious sea came going for the Lord, the doubtless breaking back his sheaves, rejoice in shalt return.

These are the intimations again. Immediately after the service, there will be the congregational fellowship, and of course the usual tea and sandwiches and conversation.

[34 : 01] And then John Angus McLeod will lead a discussion on the call to service. On Wednesday at 7.30, the prayer meeting and Bible study will be followed by the psalmody class.

On Thursday at 6.30, the boys club. And at 7.45, the women's interest group, and that will be held this week, this month in the month, 77 Forest Avenue.

And Dr. Alice Bizet will show her slides of Israel. Then on Saturday, I'm sorry I missed this out in the morning, although I'd been instructed to make the intimation, the congregational get-together will meet at 7 o'clock.

The magazines, the February issue of the monthly record, and the instructor, have now arrived, and subscribers should collect their copies at the door.

There are spare magazines, and anyone should feel free to take one of these. Looking ahead a little bit, on Thursday the 25th of February, there will be a special missionary meeting at 7.30, when we hope to have with us Pastor John Moldovan of Romania, who will tell us of the difficulties of Christian worship in a communist state.

[35 : 34] And please note that date, a week on Thursday, it will raise certain, or it might have raised certain difficulties for the running of the boys' club concurrently, but if we hold a meeting in the church, and I think that's a sensible thing to do, because it will be a city-wide effort, and we're already in collaboration with other churches, if we hold it in the church, then that should get over the difficulty of a clash.

Then I think I ought to remind you of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship Annual Meeting in Aberdeen.

This will be held on Monday the 22nd of February at 7.30 in Gilcombson South Church of Scotland in Union Street. The chairman will be Dr. Jonas Barkley, or Berkeley, with Moira Campbell, who works amongst the Taiwanese tribal churches in Taiwan, John Hay, who has been pioneering a church in Asaikawa, Japan, and Dick Dowsett, of course, who is the organising secretary of the OMF for Scotland.

There will be slides, Bible messages, and a book stall. Thank you. Well, these are all the intimations.

And now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.