

July 28, 2021 | Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture

Week 11 | Psalm 119:73-80 | Yodh

Today, we move on to the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Yodh. <Insert Picture>

In the following stanza, the Psalmist expresses that he is the result of a divine Creator whose work was not yet finished. Like us all, our singer/songwriter knows he's a work in progress. This does not keep him from doing the will of God. He will make sure that he is an example for all who fear the Lord so that they might be able to rejoice when God fulfills His promises in the life of our wanderer. And even when the Psalmist fails, he will take comfort in knowing that the affliction he is experiencing is evidence of God's faithfulness. Like a good Father, God will not allow his own to wander without some disciplinary action. This is not to say our writer enjoys chastisement. Far from it, he requests mercy so that he might live once again. And even when he is afflicted without cause by nefarious agents, he will meditate on the word of the Lord. In doing this, our Psalmist sees himself as one to be followed. Thus, anyone wanting to know how to live this life need only come and ask the Psalmist for advice. For he has been through the refiner's fire and been made pure because of it.

READ: Psalm 119:73-80 (ESV)

Yodh

⁷³ Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.

⁷⁴ Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.

⁷⁵ I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

⁷⁶ Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant.

⁷⁷ Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸ Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹ Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies.

⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame!

What are the principles the Psalmist is trying to instill in this tenth stanza?

- Vs. 73 The Psalmist use of the Hebrew word *asah* ("made") recalls the story of creation where God made the whole world and man to tend it (cf. Gen. 1-2).¹ This word imagines God as a potter molding and shaping us like clay (cf. Isa. 64:8). And like all good artisans, Yahweh shaped humanity with his own "hands." Rather than speak us into existence as He did when He created light, vegetation, or every other living creature, God "fashioned" mankind with his own mighty palms and precise fingers (cf. Gen. 2:7). He stitched together every atom in every man, woman, and child who has ever lived with divine intentionality (cf. Ps. 139:13-16). Essentially, the Psalmist is saying that God alone is the one who made him what he was.² Knowing this, our singer/songwriter then requests that he be given "understanding" so that he might "learn" God's written law ("commandments"). This implies that while the act of creation may begin at conception, it does not cease when a person becomes an adult. Physically, maturity is attained at a certain age; but spiritually, a person is never fully matured. There is always more growing that needs to be done for the inner man. Learning and understanding is a lifelong endeavor. So just as God has formed our physique, He is also at work forming our psyche. In this way, God's creative work is never finished.
- Vs. 74 Isaiah the prophet declared that God's word, once spoken, will not return empty-handed (cf. Isa. 55:10-11). Wherever the Scriptures are sown, they will inevitably bear fruit (cf. Mat. 13:1-23). In the Psalmist's case, he has "hoped" in the "word" of the Lord. This a hope that is as sure and steady as any. And because our sojourner has not hidden this hope, all those who, like him, "fear the Lord" will "rejoice" when they see God's promises fulfilled. Followers of God who live as examples to those around them will embolden others to walk faithfully with the Lord. And few things are as encouraging as realizing that we are not alone on this journey. Many others have not "bent the knee," nor given up the fight (cf. 1 Ki. 19:18).
- Vs. 75 Often, when we find ourselves amid a bad situation, we allow our feelings to guide our understanding. We tend to think that God must hate us. This is

¹ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 3:409.

² Kidner, Derek, *Psalms 73-150*, The Kidner Classic Commentaries, (Downers Grove, ILL: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, Reprint, 2008), p. 462.

especially the case when we only have ourselves to blame for the poor choices we've made. But experiencing the results of our mistakes is a mercy, not cruelty. This is the point the Psalmist is making here when he says that "in faithfulness you have afflicted me." The Hebrew word used for "afflicted" is *anah*, and it is the same word used in Deut. 8, where God is said to have "humbled" the Israelites during their forty-year wanderings.³ Undoubtedly, our wanderer's initial assumption when he faced the consequences of his actions was that God had abandoned him. But that couldn't have been farther from the truth. On the contrary, the Lord was testing and teaching him. And the very presence of that affliction was evidence of God's faithfulness (cf. Ps. 94:12; Pro. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:6). What's more, he did not derive this conclusion from his feelings. He came to this verdict because of what he knew. He "knows" that God's commandments ("rules") are "righteous." They are right, and he is not. They have not changed; he has. They have not punished him without cause; he has broken his promises without cause. So, in faithful love, the Lord "afflicts" the Psalmist to bring him back in line with God's righteous rules. Thus, when you know the character of God, even punishment and discipline is understood as an act of devotion.

Vs. 76 *Khesēd* comes to the forefront once again (cf. v. 41, 48, 64). God's covenantal love is of great "comfort" to the Psalmist, especially since he's grappling with the consequences of his actions, as indicated in the previous verse. He knows that God will not break His "promises." The Psalmist views himself as nothing more than a "servant." True, he may have disobeyed, but he knows that the Lord is a good master who will not abandon our sojourner. After all, God is faithful even when we are not. So, the Psalmist invokes that *khesēd* kind of love in his plea for solace and sympathy. And what better way to base your request than on a love that is by its nature "loyal."⁴

Vs. 77 The Psalmist knows that if it wasn't for God's "mercy," life would not exist. The very fact that he continues to breathe even though he has failed is

³ Wilcock, Michael, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today, (Downers Grove, Ill; InterVarsity Press Academic, 2001), p. 205.

⁴ Allen, Leslie C., *Psalm 101-150*, The World Biblical Commentary, Volume 21, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), p. 187.

proof enough that God is longsuffering and compassionate. Our sojourner will take every advantage he can get. This is why he petitions the Lord for more mercy that he might "live" once again. The Psalmist may be looking at his present state and thinking that he isn't really living at all. To be under the weight of affliction and judgment makes for a hard existence (cf. Pro. 13:15). He wants to change his circumstances, but he cannot succeed unless God is compassionate. Where would we be if not for the grace of God?

Vs. 78 When the truth is brought against the accused, justice is upheld. But when "falsehood" is plastered on the innocent, only the accusers are put to "shame." The Psalmist has been "wronged" by these gossips. They have whispered sweet lies against our sojourner. And instead of answering them according to their folly, the Psalmist murmurs the "precepts" of God (cf. Pro. 26:4). In doing so, our wanderer is looking for vindication. He brings before the court evidence of his good character in accordance with God's word. All that the slanders can do is spew out colorless rumors which have no purchase in reality. They have tried to subvert justice by underhanded means, and the Psalmist will not stand for it. And so, he wants them to be exposed as the frauds they are and to be put to shame for what they've done (cf. Es. 7:7-10). It is high time that these defamers get their just deserts.⁵

Vs. 79 Our Psalmist is not shy concerning his attachment to the Lord. He is so confident in his devotion that any who "fear the Lord" may turn to him for guidance (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). He has walked many miles with the Lord, and he would be willing to help others in their pursuit of God. Should they "turn" to him, he would speak of the Lord's "testimonies." Our wanderer would tell them of how often God came to his rescue, even when he did not deserve rescue. He would testify to Yahweh's wondrous works and thereby encourage fellow believers in their way. Marking out yourself as an example to follow implies a life devoid of hypocrisy and full of devotion. To be able to say, "Follow me as I have followed God" ought to be the goal of all veteran believers.

⁵ Longman, Tremper, III, & David E. Garland, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 874.

Vs. 80 Immersing one's mind ("heart") in the "statues" of the Lord is like bathing raw minerals in a refiner's fire (cf. Mal. 3:1-4). It purges the conscience of all impurities resulting in a product that is "blameless." Thus, when the intellect is displayed for all to see, the speaker is celebrated. The words of wisdom born from the fires of Scripture bring glory and honor to the Lord. Far from being "shamed," our sojourner is rewarded for his due diligence. But the converse is true as well. For when the pressures of life descend on a heart that lacks integrity, it will inevitably break. And the waters which flow from an impure heart are poisonous. They corrupt all who hear its vile speech. And while some defects can be hidden for a season, eventually, what is in a person comes out. And when whatever has been trapped inside is brought into the daylight, the result is humiliation and dishonor (cf. Mat. 15:15-20).

"What's your takeaway?"

My takeaway this evening is this: we ought to be examples for others to follow. None of us are perfect, but many of us have experiences that could help someone just starting out. If we were to see ourselves as individuals to be followed, I wonder how that would affect our day-to-day activities.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Psalm 119: Learning the Letters of Scripture | Week 11

TITLE: Yodh

TEXT: Psalm 119:73-80

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: