

Psalm 119:33-40

*Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, *
and I shall keep it to the end.
Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law; *
I shall keep it with all my heart.
Make me go in the path of your commandments, *
for that is my desire.
Incline my heart to your decrees *
and not to unjust gain.
Turn my eyes from watching what is worthless; *
give me life in your ways.
Fulfill your promise to your servant, *
which you make to those who fear you.
Turn away the reproach which I dread, *
because your judgments are good.
Behold, I long for your commandments; *
in your righteousness preserve my life.*

There was a verse in our Psalm today that made me think. You know, it is a good idea that you all read through the passages before you come on Sunday. You can find them in the weekly bulletin or you can always find them online at “The Lectionary Page.com.” The verse that held me up for a minute was, “Behold, I long for your commandments.”

Do you think that is true? Well, of course it was true for the person who wrote it, but is it true for us? Do we long for God’s commandments? Do we seek boundaries over which not to cross and a truth that should not and cannot be rationalized away? Do we look for direction from God?

Well, the answer is not as straightforward as we might think. It is both a yes and a no answer. We like the ones that tell us how we are going to be blessed and wealthy and powerful. We like it when Nehemiah says that “the God of Heaven will make us prosper.” We like that. We like the words from Deuteronomy, “You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...” We can embrace those thoughts.

We are less enamored, however, with the ones that tells us about statutes, and commandments, and laws, and decrees. Yet, there is David, King David, the most powerful person in all of Israel, longing to be commanded. And admitting that he doesn’t get it.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes...and I will keep it.

Help me understand, and I will keep your laws with all my heart.

He is not consulting with God here. He is saying teach me, help me understand what they are, not why you did it this way or that way. Teach me what they are and I will keep them gladly, no questions asked.

And then he goes on and tells God, "...even when I don't know, make me go, MAKE ME GO, on the path that you have set, because that is truly my desire."

When he is fighting against himself desiring unjust gains, he asks God to change his heart. When he is watching what is worthless, he asks for a new kind of life. Change me Lord, because I would not want to be out of synch with you. Judge me Lord, because your judgments are good."

Teach me, help me understand, firmly direct me. All because I need it and you are good and in you all things are good. I wonder if there is something in that Psalm we heard for us to think about in the context of our lives today.

There is a new study out by Harvard.

On a side note, do you know what Harvard's founding motto was? It was *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, which means Truth for Christ and the Church. Unfortunately, in more recent times they shortened it to simply *Veritas* (Truth). In the original crest there were three books. Two were lying open with the pages facing up. The third was lying open facing down to symbolize that human knowledge has limits. Now on the crest all three books are open, facing up.

The study came out of its psychology department. I read an overview of it that was entitled, *Parents Who Raise "Good" Kids Do These 5 Things*. As I read through it, I couldn't help but think of the original crest and how all that they were reporting from a deeply secular viewpoint is right out of Scripture.

Point 1: Spending quality time with your children and not just being physically around. Deuteronomy 6:7 says, "You shall teach them (God's Words) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Of the things that are important in our lives, we are to teach them diligently. Talk about them we are home, out in the world, when we wake in the morning and go to sleep at night. We are to bring meaning and pass on understanding. We are to fill our children up with love and wisdom.

As 2 Timothy says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." As our children grow, our quality presence gives us the chance to convey those things that will enable and empower our children for the fullness of life.

Point 2 from the Harvard study: Let your kids see a strong moral role model and mentor in you. In 1 John, we hear that we should not love in just word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Our children are looking for moral role models. They seek heroes and we are the heroes that God put into their lives.

While presence is important, authentic moral presence is essential. Proverbs says, "The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them." Our children have a very refined authenticity meter. What we do must align with what we say. If it doesn't the family tree becomes poisoned and its future becomes unhealthy and unproductive. Jesus saw this and so he taught, "We either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit."

Point 3 from the Harvard study: Teach your kids to care for others and set high ethical expectations. Scripture is full of such things. Bear one's burdens. Forgive as you have been forgiven. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and as you would have them do unto others, and always remember that as you do such things you are doing them unto Christ. And, of course, as Jesus told us, he came not to be served but to serve and we should adopt that as our model.

Our faith tells us that we are to be people not simply locked in our own world but rather there are expectations of us beyond self-interest.

Point 4: We should encourage our kids to practice appreciation and gratitude. Now, this is more than just being polite and saying thank you. While the Harvard study says that we should have appreciation for people who contribute to our lives, a biblical gratitude takes it much further. Having a biblical attitude of appreciation and gratitude is part of a worldview that takes us beyond self-focus. We are grateful because we recognize a greater source of our blessings. But our gratitude isn't limited to what blesses us. We are grateful for how all people are blessed and we are even grateful when worldly blessings seem to allude us.

As we hear in 1 Thessalonians, "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

And then point 5: Teach your children to see the big picture.

Things like:

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And Love your neighbor as yourself.

If anyone would be first, he must be last.

Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

That's the big picture. The big picture that brings Joy, and Peace, and Purpose, and meaning to our lives and to the lives of our children.

You know, I'm not sure whether Harvard knew it, but they were not just reporting a study. They were giving a sermon.

Amen