

Show Me the Way

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"Road Less Traveled" by Carolyn Kinder

Prayer of Illumination

Thy word, O Lord, is a lamp to our feet
and a light unto our path.

By the power of your Holy Spirit,
Shine your light on us and open our eyes,
that we might behold wondrous things out of your law.

Help us to run in the way of your commandments,
for you, O God, enlarge our understanding.

Amen.

Introduction

In the Greek myth *"Hercules at the Crossroads,"* Hercules went deep in the forest by himself to think. He had just made a grave mistake by letting his rage get the better of him. *What direction would his life go now?*

As Hercules internally wrestled with his next steps, two women appeared to him. Both were dazzlingly beautiful.

- One wore sensuous colors and glittering jewelry,
- the other was clad in simple white.
- The first was Vice, and she said:
- "Choose me, and you'll enjoy ceaseless pleasure and a life of ease."
- The other was Virtue, and she said:
- "Choose me, and you'll have *both* honor and hardship, for you cannot reap what you do not sow."

Hercules chose the path of Virtue—both the sweet, and the bitter.

The wisdom literature of the Bible often speaks of two life paths we can choose to take—the foolish path and the wise path.

Our life path is really about our orientation and direction along this life journey of ours.

- Is it towards God or towards selfishness?
- Towards community or alienation?
- Wisdom or folly?

I love our morning's Psalm; it offers us a detailed topography of the wise path God lays out for us to walk in by His grace. It's warm and passionate—the entire Psalm speaks directly to God. Really, it's one long prayer. Not only that, Psalm 119 is the longest of the 150 Psalms and even has a nickname, "the Giant Psalm."

And it's an alphabet of praise—literally from A to Z.

There are 22 stanzas—one stanza for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each eight-verse long stanza begins with a letter of the alphabet—starting with A, then B, then C, going all the way to Z (see [NKJV](#) version).

It's been said the Eskimo have numerous words for snow. In Psalm 119, the author uses eight different synonyms to talk about *torah*—God's guidance or teaching. As one commentator puts it, Psalm 119 "swarms with synonyms." The psalmist holds up God's Word like a diamond and looks at it from every possible angle. And in the process, we become absorbed and immersed in not only God's word, but in God almighty.

The theme of Psalm 119 has been described as "**the secret and wonder of the revelation of God's will.**" The very expression of God's will and love for God's people. It's God's *way* for us.

So Psalm 119 is a guidebook for the journey of life—through the wilderness of discouragement, the refreshing springs of hope, the valley of sickness and suffering, and the mountaintops of celebration.

We're all sojourners and pilgrims along this very fragile and fleeting life and we need all the guidance we can get. God's purposes and our purpose are found along this way. Psalm 119 reminds us the Scriptures aren't just a set of taboos, rules and regulations, and SHALT NOTs to keep us from enjoying life. No, God's word is a gift. A communication between the divine and the human to help us live a truly human and godly life, all by God's grace.

Psychologists say there are eight primary emotions we human beings experience: JOY, LOVE, FEAR, SURPRISE, SADNESS, DISGUST, ANGER, and ANTICIPATION. The other emotions are combinations of these eight. No matter what emotion we're experiencing—we can listen to God's word for the season we find ourselves in. Psalm 119 is a prayer for the whole of life.

In Judaism, this psalm is read during the feast of Pentecost, which is 50 days after Passover, celebrating God's gift of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

So let's hear from:

Scripture: Psalm 119:9-32 (NRSVue)

How can young people keep their way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.

¹¹ I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.

¹² Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.

¹³ With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.

¹⁴ I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

¹⁷ Deal bountifully with your servant,
so that I may live and observe your word.

¹⁸ Open my eyes, so that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.

¹⁹ I live as an alien in the land;
do not hide your commandments from me.

²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing
for your ordinances at all times.

- ²¹ You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,
who wander from your commandments;
- ²² take away from me their scorn and contempt,
for I have kept your decrees.
- ²³ Even though princes sit plotting against me,
your servant will meditate on your statutes.
- ²⁴ Your decrees are my delight;
they are my counselors.
- ²⁵ My soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to your word.
- ²⁶ When I told of my ways, you answered me;
teach me your statutes.
- ²⁷ Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
- ²⁸ My soul melts away for sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word.
- ²⁹ Put false ways far from me,
and graciously teach me your law.
- ³⁰ I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I set your ordinances before me.
- ³¹ I cling to your decrees, O Lord;
let me not be put to shame.
- ³² I run the way of your commandments,
for you enlarge my understanding.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – “Show Me the Way”

The highlight of my sabbatical last year was going on the “Camino de Santiago” in Spain with Sarah. About 300,000 people a year go on this pilgrimage called “The Way to Santiago.” We walked along The Way about 15 miles a day for five days, totaling 75 miles.

There’s a path you take the whole way—with milestone markers. We loved the yellow arrows and shell symbols that kept us on the way. There were many times those milestone markers and yellow arrows gave us much comfort—we were on the right track. And there were times when you had to pay a little more attention to where you were going—it wasn’t always clear which way was “the way.”



A few times, Sarah and I were talking and not paying attention to the path. We found ourselves off the path—without knowing it. Our fellow pilgrims called out to us, “Hey come back, the path is this way!” Relieved, we backtracked and rejoined the group.

Some days we were energized. Other days we were more tired, or the knees ached. Some days were sunny, other days were rainy. But we stayed on the path.

There was a purpose—pilgrimage and the destination at the end—Santiago de Compostela Cathedral.

We loved the journey and we loved the destination.

Psalm 119 reminds us that God’s way for us is a lot like a pilgrimage and a journey. It involves all of us: our Mind, heart, body, and soul.

MIND – Reflection on God’s Word

- Recount and rehearse with your lips the decrees of God’s mouth.
- Ponder his precepts, consider his paths, meditate on God’s wonders.
- Teach me your ways O Lord, broaden my understanding.
- Tell yourself: I will fix my mind on your ways God and study them.
- Your Word and Way is my trusted counselor, my intimate companion.
- I WILL NOT forget your ways.

We’re also on a pilgrimage of the HEART.

- Have a passion for God’s Word.
- Seek God wholeheartedly.
- In my heart of hearts O God, I treasure your promise so that I don’t sin against you.
- I rejoice in the path of your instruction as much as all the riches of the world.
- Lord, you’re more precious to me than gold or silver.

Christianity is more than just what you think. Christianity is what you feel, too—it’s called orthopathy, right feeling. So don’t let your faith become just a mere checklist or a system of thought that you nod your head to. *Delight* in God’s precepts and God’s person. This word *delight*, heard over and over throughout this wonderful Psalm, describes the delight and happiness that a child brings to its mother. They are our pride and our joy. In the same way, delight in God’s word in your life.

There’s always more for us to learn. We haven’t figured it all out, we’re all in process—so dig into your faith, explore more. The very name that you’re called, disciple, means you’re a learner. So with your whole energy, get your mind, get your heart around this idea of walking and learning and following in the ways of God. It sets our heart free.

Following in God's way involves not only our mind and our heart, but our whole body. God's creative Word gets us moving in our lives.

"God, I will obey your word." The word "obey" in Hebrew? It means that you've listened well. You haven't fully listened in Hebrew until you've obeyed, and you've gone to where God has called you to go. And so "Christ, the word made flesh, I will follow you. I will follow in your footsteps wherever you lead me to go. I will live a Godward life." Don't stray from it, don't swerve from it. Run in the way of God's commandments, our scripture says. Let God's word that goes ahead of you guide your way for it propels you into mission, to your calling in life.

Finally, this path is not only a path of the mind, it's not only a path of the heart, it's not only a path for our whole being to follow, but it is a path of the soul. Our soul cries out in prayer for God's word to work in us.

"Help me God to understand and to grasp your word, O Lord. Your will for my life. Open my eyes so that I may see and perceive the wonders of Your law." Lift the veil from my eyes. I can't do this on my own, God. Remove false ways from me. Revive me by Your word, quicken me. Bring me back to life once again. From the dust I came and to the dust I will return—."

That's all of us, all our destinies. So we pray to God— "Is this the end right now, God, or will this be the beginning of a new life, a new creation for me?"

Either way, we look to God. Only divine enabling can keep us on the straight and narrow path.

Presbyterian minister and author Frederick Buechner once said, "If you want to know who you are, watch your feet. Because where your feet take you, that is who you are." As Christians, Jesus is not only our prize, He's our path. He is "the way, the truth, and the life." In fact, before we became known as Christians in the Bible, the book of Acts describes that we were called— "Followers of the Way." Jesus is a personal and moving path that we follow in our lives. Our faith is really more of a movement than it is a religion. So abide in Christ, abide in Scripture, abide in the Word proclaimed, that is inspired by the Spirit. Immerse yourself in it. Walk in it. Become so absorbed by it that it soaks deep into the very core of who you are. And let it seep out of you, out of your thoughts and your desires, your words, your actions, and your motivations.

So hear the good news! We walk, not only in Christ's footsteps, but we walk in the Word's feet and He walks in ours. Abide in the Word. For the path of the righteous, Proverbs tells us, is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Road Less Traveled*" by [Carolyn Kinder](#)

NKJV Scripture passage with Hebrew letters: <https://www.bible.com/bible/114/PSA.119.NKJV>

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