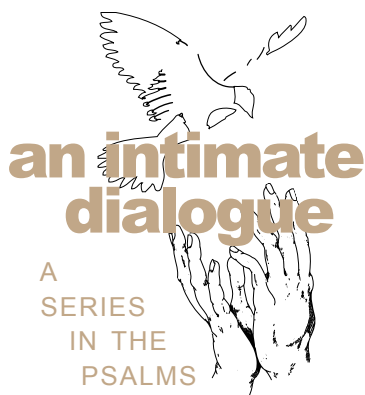


You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14-17



# LIVING BY HIS WORD

part one



**t**HE NATION CALLED the United States of America does not have as its foundation any one political party, one or more ethnic tribes, or a ruling family. Its people do not swear allegiance to a king or queen. At his (or her) inauguration, the president does not swear to uphold a state religion, a family name, or a sovereign lord. He does not pledge to defend his home state, the nation's capital, or Wall Street, but to preserve and defend the words hand-written on a very old parchment:

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

There are countries that have been formed based on a religion, an ethnic group or tribe, or that form themselves around a person of royalty, or some other dynamic, charismatic leader.

But the United States has been formed around, and is governed by, one foundational *document*—The Constitution. Its Preamble, six Articles, and

twenty-seven Amendments are the basis for the design of our government and for all our laws. Our constitution defines and explains who we are as a nation. It defines the rights of its citizens, and *limits* the rights of those who govern.

The Constitution of the United States is a unique and profound document. For the citizen, its precepts are, quite literally, words to live by.

The Christian's "constitution" is God's word: the Bible. In its sixty-six "articles" (it has no amendments) are God's instructions for knowing Him, and living close to Him. Psalm 119 is a hymn to the veracity, the faithfulness, the truth, the effectiveness—the utter *practicality* of God's holy word. This longest chapter in the Bible explains how God's word contains, for the believer, truly "words to live by." In this and the next issue of *Listening* we consider a few excerpts.

## remembering

How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By keeping it according to Your word.  
With all my heart I have sought You;  
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.

Your word I have treasured in my heart,  
That I may not sin against You.  
I will meditate on Your precepts  
And regard Your ways.  
I shall delight in Your statutes;  
I shall not forget Your word.

*Psalms 119:9-11,15-16*

Compost feeds a garden with good things, so that it is better able to fend off the bad. Just so, a life that is not nurtured with righteous things is incapable of weeding out sin.

There are still those who believe that people are essentially good—that everyone is born innocent, and any bad or evil qualities are learned, or imposed by someone else. If that be the case, permit me to pose just one question: Would you like to live with a teenager who had never received any parental discipline?

What happens to children who receive no other training than the behavior with which they were born—who are, essentially, left to raise themselves? They grow up to be adults who are selfish, arrogant, and self-centered.

The best instruction for any child—or adult, for that matter—comes from God's word, which is rich in Spiritual nutrients that make it difficult for bad things to grow—and easier for good things to take root.

A heart filled with self has little room left for God, but a heart filled with the things of God has little room left in which sin can take root and spread.

*O Lord, how can I keep my daily walk innocent and holy? By encircling it with the protection of Your very word. I have followed after You with the intensity of the center of my being. Do not let me go astray from those things You have commanded. Your word is a precious treasure to me, and I have kept it resonating in my heart so that I would remain true to You. To help me remember, I speak aloud the holy words You have revealed to us, and I look with pleasure and joy upon the path You have set before me. I take pleasure in the words of Your covenant with us. In so doing, I will not forget what You have said to us.*

## in the weeping

My soul cleaves to the dust;  
Revive me according to Your word.  
My soul weeps because of grief;  
Strengthen me according to Your word.  
Remove the false way from me,  
And graciously grant me Your law.  
I cling to Your testimonies;  
O Lord, do not put me to shame!

*Psalms 119:25,28,29,31*

Our lives can consist, for the most part, of one benign event after another. We go about our daily business healthy and strong, vigorous, filled with confidence. But one day some force happens along and drops its load on our life. We're suddenly brought low under the crushing weight of tragedy or loss, despair—even unspeakable sin. We are, after all, only dust.

How we respond to these untimely encumbrances speaks volumes about who we are—and from whom we have gained our character. Even Christians may be listening to the wrong voices; even believers may be giving allegiance to the wrong authorities which will—either immediately or eventually—undermine our ability to stand.

There is only one Voice that instills in us the strength of character and profitable dependency to ensure that when the storm blast hits, we will still be standing. There is only one Voice that strengthens with love, builds up with reproof, and encourages with mercy.

That Voice is the Lord's.

*O God, I feel as low as a worm. I have made the dust my home. Make me to live again, as You have promised in Your word. I am poured out; my soul has melted from my sorrow. Make me stand again, as Your word has promised. I am weary of all the lies of this place; I am tired of listening to them. O God, turn off my inclination to give them heed, and replace it with an inclination for Your law. I will hold fast to Your promises. They will be my hope—my life! O Lord, let me not be disappointed.*

## the witness

May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O Lord,

Your salvation according to Your word;  
So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me,  
For I trust in Your word.  
And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,  
For I wait for Your ordinances.  
I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings  
And shall not be ashamed.

*Psalms 119:41-43,46*

God doesn't ask us never to have questions. His word and ways can stand up to our interrogation. But some believers try to keep their feet in two camps at once—what James referred to as a "double-minded" man.

Jesus, too, spoke against those running hot and cold with the things of God. He said,

**"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters."**

*Luke 11:23*

The true witness of the believer is his or her constancy. Standing alone, or beside other believers, the Christian is always to stand for the things of God.

Every day of our lives we are challenged to stand for Christ. We go to the grocery store, shop for new clothes, get gas for the car, visit with a neighbor over the back fence. In every situation Christ calls on us to remain true to Him.

*O Lord, I pray for Your mercy, for You to help me as You have promised—so that when someone tries to shoot holes in my faith, I will be confident in Your holy word. Please God, never remove my privilege of sharing Your truth with others. May I always be worthy of this honor and burden, for I find my hope in Your laws. Even when I speak of You to rulers and leaders, I will do so boldly and confidently, without embarrassment.*

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Continued next week in *Part Two*