

Heth
Psalm 119:57-64
ABC 6/24/18

The Greek philosopher Socrates, when put on trial for corrupting the young & disrespecting the Republic, wisely declared, *The unexamined life is not worth living.*¹ In vss 57-64 of Ps 119, the poet appears to be in agreement as he notes the importance of thinking on his ways & carefully examining his life. As the Psalmist reflects on his own life, he's driven to consider the God he loves & serves. He cannot think of himself apart from His God. He can only conclude that he serves a wonderful Lord who is his portion (57) & whose *hesed*, faithful love, or lovingkindness fills the earth (64). Because he serves a wonderful God, he'll respond in several specific & precise ways. Spurgeon says of this stanza, *the psalmist seems to take firm hold upon God Himself: appropriating Him (57), crying out for Him (58), returning to Him (59), solacing himself in Him (61, 62), associating with His people (63), & sighing for personal experience of His goodness (64).*² Listen as we read God's Word to us today. **57-64** PRAY

What is your portion? What is your inheritance? What is the great desire of your heart? In pre-marital counseling I ask couples what their desire is that they have for their marriage. & the answers are sometimes revealing as to what they want most in their marriage. We all want something. We all desire something. We all have aspirations. Our heart is set on certain things. & this psalm is about what a believer's heart is set on.

1. The Lord is My Portion This section begins with the claim, **the LORD is my portion** (57). Ps 24:1 tells us, **The earth is the Lord's & the fullness thereof.** In essence, that's what the psalmist declares here. In other words, to have the Lord is to have everything! Everything we will ever need we have in our Lord (57, 64). There's no possession like Jehovah Himself. One commentator points out, *Two great OT words beginning with heth must have jostled for attention when the psalmist reached this stanza. He began its 1st vs with the word for **portion**, hēleg, & its last with*

¹ *Plato's Apology*, 38a

² *Treasury of David*, vol 3, p 254

*the word for **lovingkindness**, hesed, & thus its theme was practically chosen for him: the believer's deep personal relationship with the Lord & His word.*³

The 1st thing we learn is that the believer's **portion**, inheritance, desire, & treasure is the Lord Himself. The declaration, **The Lord is my portion** is personal & powerful. We should understand that statement in 2 ways. It's a statement of reality about every believer, but it's also a statement of desire. 1st, it's a statement of reality. The greatest gift that God gives you, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ (if you've understood your sin & have looked to Jesus in faith for forgiveness, if you've been pardoned, if you've been renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit), then the highest gift that God has given you is not forgiveness nor eternal life. When you hear that at 1st it might cause eyebrows to raise because these are pretty awesome gifts. But the highest gift that God gives you as a believer is Himself. He forgives you so He can give you Himself. Justification is a glorious doctrine in which we learn that God, by grace, grants us forgiveness & pardon & acceptance based not on what we've done but based on the work of Christ alone & received by us through faith alone. But that is not the greatest gift God gives. The greatest gift God gives is Himself. The forgiveness is so we can commune with Him, so we can enjoy the greatest gift He gives, which is union & fellowship with Him. As God says, **I will ... be your God, & you shall be My people** (Lev 26:12). The ultimate goal of justification is so we can enjoy God being our God & we being His people. This statement, **the Lord is my portion**, is a statement of fact. It's true of every believer. He is our **portion**. He's given Himself to us. Isn't that wonderful? We can truthfully say, *You are my God & my portion*. He provides salvation so we can experience the blessing of communion with Him. Soak this in. It's a statement of fact that if you're trusting in Christ, if you're resting in His grace, the almighty God of the universe, God Himself is your **portion**. It's a glorious thing to contemplate. Where does this kind of language come from? When Israel entered the promised land, each of the tribes was given a portion of land except for one, the priestly tribe of Levi. The Levites were given 48 priestly cities scattered throughout the land & were to live there so their service would be widely available. They had no

³ Michael Wilcock, *Psalms 73-150*, p 201

land, but they were given something better. It was said of them that they had **no inheritance** or **portion** in the land because **their inheritance** or **portion was the Lord** (Josh 13:33; 21). The psalmist is saying that, like the Levites, he wants his **portion** of divine blessing to be God Himself since nothing is better & nothing will ever fully satisfy his or anyone else's heart but God Himself (Ps 16:5-6). To possess God is truly to have everything. In Num 18:20 the Lord tells the Levites, **I am your portion & your inheritance**. The psalmist applies this to himself & by extension to all God's people. To have the Lord of all creation as your **portion** or inheritance is to have everything! Puritan Thomas Brooks says we could answer every temptation with the reply, **The Lord is my portion**. If He truly is our **portion**, then we look for satisfaction nowhere else. What an inheritance. What a privilege. What a blessing. All I have I have in my God, a God whose **lovingkindness** fills the earth (64).

But this is also a statement of ambition because the psalmist knows that frequently, even though God has given Himself to us, we want something else. We think there's greater satisfaction somewhere else. That was the challenge in the Garden, wasn't it? When the serpent says to Eve, *What God said isn't true. In the day you eat of this fruit you won't die. In fact, the reason God has forbidden this fruit is because He knows if you eat it your eyes will be opened & you'll be like Him* (Gen 3:1-5). In other words, *You can find blessing outside of God*. & that sin plays itself over & over again every time we sin. When we sin, we think that by disobeying what God says in His Word we can find a greater satisfaction than in God Himself. It's a root sin & is found in every sin. So when the psalmist says, **the Lord is my portion**, he's expressing a spiritual desire. He doesn't want something else to occupy his heart. He wants God to be the ultimate object of his affection. He wants God to be his whole desire. **The Lord is my portion**. *The Lord is all I want. The Lord is well worth living for. The Lord is my desire*. In the 3rd vs of the hymn *Jesus, Lover of My Soul*,⁴ the 1st line says, *Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find*. That's Ps 119:57 stated in terms of Christ. William Guthrie says of Jesus: *Less would not satisfy, more could not be desired*.⁵ Augustine prayed, *Lord, give me Yourself!* & so the psalmist is expressing an aspiration of the

⁴ #151 in our hymnal

⁵ Quoted by Calum MacMillian, <https://rosskeen.freechurch.org/2013/07/16/hungry/>

soul. *God, I want to treasure You as my portion above everything else in life.* Most of the battle of the spiritual life is fought right here because all of us have hopes & dreams that haven't come about & all of us have things in our lives that we wish we didn't have. & all of us are tempted to think that if our hopes & dreams that haven't come true would come true, we'd have the joy & satisfaction we've always wanted. Or if we didn't have these things in our lives then we'd have it. Wrong! The psalmist is saying, *Lord, help me not believe those lies because the joy & satisfaction I've always wanted is found only in You because **You are my portion.*** As Christians, we have a rich spiritual inheritance in the Lord Jesus Christ & we are **complete in Him** (Col 2:9-10). He is our life (Col 3:4), & our **all in all** (Col 3:11). Because we are in Him, we have **all things that pertain to life & godliness** (2 Pt 1:3). The Lord is our **portion**. The believer's portion, the believer's inheritance is the Lord Himself. That's a statement of fact & a statement of desire & ambition. &, if this is true, if you're a person who treasures the Lord above everything else, if you have an aspiration to have the Lord as your **portion**, then the rest of vs 57 will be true as well. **57**

To have the Lord as our **portion** calls for an immediate response of commitment & devotion, *I promise to keep Your words.* Overwhelmed by the reality of his relationship with the sovereign God of the universe, he makes a promise, a pledge, to obey his Lord's words. The close connection with God that receives & enjoys Him as one's **portion** also receives strength to keep His Words. This isn't done out of obligation but out of love. Jesus puts it perfectly in Jn 14:15, **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.** God's gift to us is God Himself! Our gift to Him is an easy one, we promise to keep His words. Why? Because we love Him. Those who treasure the Lord treasure His Word. & the psalmist comes right out & says it. *Because You're my portion, I treasure Your Word & promise to keep it because I want to.* When we meet Christians or those who say they're Christians, who say they treasure the Lord but they don't treasure His Word, we know something's wrong. & what's wrong isn't with God nor with His Word; it's with their own heart. Those who know the Lord can say with the psalmist, **the Lord is my portion**, & they will also treasure & obey His Word. So Jesus can say, **Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God** (Mt 4:4). &, **It is My food to do the will of Him who sent Me** (Jn

4:34). Christians love to follow God's Word because He is our **portion**. The psalmist had made promises to obey the Lord (8, 15-16, 32-34, 47, 106, 115), but that isn't how we get our inheritance from the Lord. What He provides for us is a gracious gift, not a loan, & we aren't required to repay Him (Rom 11:33-36).

2. Seek God's Favor 58

The poet sought the face of God with a sense of inability, shown in his request, **be gracious to me**. No matter how diligently the psalmist would seek after God & seek to please Him, he'd always remain in need of God's mercy. & our request for God's mercy is never based on our rights or deserving it. We expect mercy according to the promise of God in His Word. Accept the inheritance He's give you, rejoice in it, & trust Him to supply every need. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said, **you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, & with all your soul, & with all your mind, & with all your strength** (Mk 12:30). In other words, God wants you to love all of Him with all of you all the time. The presence of God is the highest form of His favor. To seek God's favor is to seek God Himself, to get to know Him on a personal basis as He's revealed Himself to us in Scripture. Will those who seek Him find Him? Of course! Jesus said of prayer in general, **Ask & it will be given to you; seek & you will find; knock & the door will be opened to you** (Mt 7:7). If that promise applies to such common things as food, clothing, & a place to live, can we think it doesn't apply to the pursuit of God? Those who seek God will surely find Him. We also learn here that believers live by God's favor, by His grace (29, 132). Notice again that the psalmist dwells on favor & mercy, he never dreams of merit. He doesn't demand, but begs because he knows his own unworthiness. He's saying, *The way I live, Lord, isn't by pulling myself up by the boot straps, not by being good enough to earn Your love, the way I live is by Your favor & grace*. He has great confidence in God faithfully doing as He's said. How do we get to that point in our lives? Vss 58-60 provide 3 helpful steps.

A. Pray Following closely his promise to keep God's Word (57), the psalmist prays, **58a**

The idea is asking God to look on us with **favor**. *Turn Your face toward me in kindness. I have made a promise to obey you (57), now I ask for You to be gracious to me as You've promised.*

This kind of appeal flows naturally from one whose whole heart is focused on the Lord (2, 7, 10, 11, 32, 34, 36). What wonderful access we have to our heavenly Father. We can go to Him & talk with Him anytime & anyplace about anything. Only through Jesus is this possible (1 Tim 2:5). Please note, what he longs to have from God is God's **favor**. Not fortune nor fame, but **favor**. Literally it says, *I want Your face*. Years ago I read of an African tribe that when you greeted someone you said, *I see you*, meaning, *I'm looking at you, you have my attention*. That's what the psalmist wants. *God, I want Your face looking at me, I want to live in Your presence. I want to be in communion with You*. How does he seek this? **With all his heart**. How does he plead this? Look at the end of the vs: **According to Your word or promise**. He pleads the promise of God.

*Lord, I'm Your child. You've promised me Your favor. I'm seeking it with all my heart. You've said that, **If with all your heart you seek Me, you will surely find Me** (Jer 29:13). Lord, I'm pleading that promise. Let me find You. I want Your face, Your favor. I want it with all my heart & I'm just praying Your promises back to You.*

The poet, as much as he loves God's Law, knows he lives by God's favor, by God's grace, & by God's promise.

B. Think The psalmist is introspective & self-reflective in the 1st part of vs **59**.

The psalmist's determination to keep God's Word, wasn't a hasty impulse, but a steely resolve, the result of thinking on his former sinful ways. Too many pass through life & into eternity without a serious thought to their way of life. But the author examines his own heart & ways. It's an important thing for us to consider our ways & understand our sins are destructive & then make an about-face, repent, & determine to go God's way in God's strength instead. This is a good thing for us to do on a regular basis. Think about your life, your plans, & priorities. Do they line up with God's? Satan will work hard against this. With all kinds of diversions & distractions, he'll try & prevent us from rightly thinking about ourselves & our God.

As Christians we must discipline ourselves to maintain a focus on God's Word, prayer, & fellowship. & so we read the Bible & meditate on it, we pray, & we fellowship with one another in our local church. We know this is the stuff of the Christian life. Yet in his classic work *Holy Helps for a Godly Life*, Richard Rogers draws out a spiritual discipline that's largely been lost & neglected, the discipline of watchfulness. As he says, watchfulness is *a careful observing of our*

hearts & diligent looking to our ways, that they may be pleasing & acceptable unto God. This is to be done in obedience to passages like 1 Pt 5:8 which says, **Be sober-minded; be watchful,** & Mt 26:41 where Jesus commands, **Watch & pray that you may not enter into temptation.** That's what we see the psalmist doing in vs 59. Rogers again says, *Without watchfulness, we are before long plunged into many foul temptations by Satan & by our own sinful hearts.* Watchfulness is 1st the close observation of our hearts, for, as Solomon commands, **Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life** (Prov 4:23). 2nd, it's a close study of our ways or our lives. **I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth with a muzzle** (Ps 39:1). In watchfulness we take careful heed to our inner & outer selves, our desires & deeds, to ensure they're both pleasing to God. So how is this discipline carried out? 1st, by putting ourselves in a frame of watchfulness, we consider our ways. 2nd, by prayer. Prayerful watching must continue as long as we're in danger of being tempted to sin, which is all of life. Here's how Rogers declares the benefit of being watchful:

*This taking heed therefore to yourself & especially to your heart (because the words & actions come from the heart) must be your companion all the time, & you must set this watch before the door of your lips & be well acquainted with looking diligently to your ways, that it may go well with you & that you may prosper. But if you are a stranger to watchfulness, look to fall often—I mean to fall dangerously. Look to find many wounds in your soul & to lack many comforts in your life.*⁶

Isn't that good? We all must be watchful & consider our ways. Here's one way to remember vs 59:

- Deliberation, **I considered...** Stop & think.
- Destination, **I considered my ways...** Where am I headed?
- Determination, **& turned my feet...** Deciding to obey God.
- Discrimination, **& turned my feet to Your testimonies...** I'm going to follow God's ways rather than my ways.⁷

As believers we must think & consider our lives & our conduct. As Spurgeon says, *Consideration is the commencement of conversion: 1st we think, & then we turn. When the mind repents of ill*

⁶ p

⁷ John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, vol 2, pp 315-16

*ways, the feet are soon led into good ways; but there will be no repenting until there is deep, earnest thought.*⁸ But we can't stop with just thinking or considering our ways.

C. Run 59-60

Thinking truthfully about ourselves will bring us to the place of repentance. Consider the Prodigal Son who, **when he came to his senses** (Lk 15:17), quickly made his way back to his father. Thinking on where he is with his Master, the psalmist declares, *I turn my feet to Your testimonies.* Was he walking in the wrong direction? If so, not anymore. He adds, **I hastened & did not delay to keep Your commandments.** There's to be no delay in keeping God's Word. The psalmist is determined to run hard after God & His Word. There's resolve & determination in these words. A song from my childhood comes to mind: *I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.*⁹ The psalmist takes account of himself, he looks at his life & conduct, & then he goes right to the Word of God. We see this as the pattern we're to follow. Pondering must be followed by performing according to God's teachings. Look at what he says. **60**

Delay is the word used of Lot as he lingered, reluctant to leave Sodom (Gen 19:16). Hurry, don't delay. Turn to God & His Word in obedience. I already mentioned the prodigal son, but there are many others, aren't there? Zacchaeus, up in a tree trying to see Jesus, hears Jesus say, *Get down here, Zacchaeus.* & he scrambles down & heads to the house to eat with Jesus & then he quickly makes his wrongs right (Lk 19:1-10). Or think of the disciples. Jesus comes to them & calls them to their nets, their jobs & follow Him. & the gospels tell us what? *Immediately they got up & followed Him* (Mk 1:20). Or think of the Philippian jailor of Acts 16. Paul & Silas are arrested, beaten, & thrown in jail. They're singing psalms & hymns in the middle of the night & an earthquake comes & the doors are opened & all the shackles fell off. Not your ordinary earthquake. The jailor thinks all his prisoners have escaped & he's about to kill himself & Paul cries out, *Don't kill yourself. We're still here.* & immediately he wants to know the way of salvation. In contrast, think of Felix in Acts 24. Felix has Paul appear before him to explain the gospel to him. Paul starts preaching about righteousness, self-control, & the coming judgment &

⁸ www.gospelweb.net/SpurgeonGoldenAlphabet/FS_GoldenAlphabet.htm

⁹ #376 in our old hymnals

it scares Felix & he sends Paul away & says, **When I find time I will summon you** (25). As far as we know, Felix never called him back. There's the difference between the heart of the believer & the heart of an unbeliever. The believer takes stock of his thoughts, of his life, of his way, of his conduct, & runs to God's Word. Unbelievers put God off because they don't want to think about it. But what does Heb 3 say? **Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart** (8). Don't put God off. Run to Him & His Word. The believer considers his life & conduct & he runs to God's Word. But that's not all.

3. Thank God in the midst of Trials 61

The psalmist is again reminding us that opposition to the godly & to God is the normal state of things in our fallen world. In this sin-sick, rebellious world there's opposition to God, His gospel, & to those who believe in God & His gospel. Don't be surprised by that. Alan Ross is right when he writes, *There is something hollow about people pleading for God to fulfill the promises in His word when they pay little attention to keeping His word.*¹⁰ The psalmist has declared his intention to keep the commands of the Lord. Furthermore, when trials & difficulties come & the wicked try to trap him, he won't waver. He knows who he'll serve no matter what! **I have not forgotten Your law** ties in with vss 49, 52, & 55 which talked about remembering. One of the big problems with trying to live as a Christian is that we forget God's teachings & even His many mercies to us. The psalmist determined not to forget. He wanted to remember God's Law whatever the circumstances, so he might be encouraged by it & do it.

A. Don't let the wicked stop you (61) Evil people are out to take the psalmist down. The cords or ropes of the wicked have got him cornered. The Message says, *the wicked hemmed me in – there was no way out.* Evil hunters have tracked him down & snared him. Exactly how we don't know. But, we do know this: The psalmist won't forget the law of God. He will continue to honor, trust, & obey God no matter what happens to him, no matter the afflictions or persecutions. The mistreatments & unjust actions of the wicked will only drive him to his God & His Word. God is

¹⁰ *Psalms*, Vol 3, p 518

his **portion** (57) & his counsel (61, 24). God's presence & His Word will keep him running in the right direction.

B. Don't let the hour stop you (62) The psalmist declares, **At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You**. This may represent a daily pattern, like Daniel's custom of praying 3x a day (Dan 6:10). It certainly reminds us of the late night prayer habits of Jesus Himself (Lk 6:12). As Spurgeon says, *the psalmist did not get out of bed to check on nighttime robbers*. He got up to pray & thank God. After all, when God is our portion, we can't help but give Him praise no matter whether it's day or night! He gets up late at night to pray & he tells us what motivates him, because of **Your righteous ordinances**. A righteous God who has given us a righteous word is worthy of our praise anytime. This includes the midnight hour. Thomas Manton lists several lessons we can draw from the Psalmist's midnight devotion:

- His devotion was earnest & passionate; the daylight hours did not give him enough time to thank God.
- His devotion to God was sincere, shown by his willingness to thank God when no one else could see him or be impressed by his devotion.
- He regarded time as precious; he even used the hours normally given to sleep for devotion to God.
- He regarded devotion to God as more important than natural refreshment. He was willing to sacrifice legitimate things (sleep) for the pursuit of God.
- He showed great reverence to God even in secret devotion, by rising up to praise Him. Praise requires something of both soul & body.¹¹

God is worthy to be thanked at all times & all the time. As Paul put it, **In everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus** (1 Thes 5:18).

4. Godly Companions 63-64

2 ideas drive the final vss of this stanza. 1st, we're not in this alone. We have friends or companions as we run hard after God. We're not Lone Rangers. We need each other. We need the church body. Yes, wicked people may try to ruin us but we have a band of brothers & sisters to keep us on the right path. 2nd, our God is a God of *hesed*, of loyal, steadfast, faithful love. We

¹¹ Quoted by David Guzik, www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/studyguide_psa/psa_119.cfm

talked at length about this a few weeks back. No God loves His people like our God, the only true God.

A. Loyal partners are with you (63) We are known by our choice of friends. The psalmist wants to run with those who run with God. This is his tribe, his community, his family. He's a friend (& brother) to all who fear the Lord & who keep God's precepts. God's Word is a tie that binds together those whose hearts long to see the face of God turned toward them with favor. This wonderful companionship is the experience of Christians around the world who experience fellowship across the lines of race, class, nationality, & education. Young people, friends play an important role in your lives. Choose wisely. As the Bible says, **Bad company corrupts good morals** (1 Cor 15:33). Find those who fear God & have them as your closest friends. The psalmist spent his nights with God & his days with God's people. Those who fear God love those who fear Him.

B. God's lovingkindness is with you The last thing I want to draw your attention to is simply this: The psalmist tells us the world is full of testimonies or witnesses to God's **lovingkindness**. Our God's **lovingkindness** is displayed around us in many ways. Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples when they were worried? **Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? & yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father** (Mt 10:29). Have you ever gone out into your yard & found a baby bird that's fallen out of the nest? Or maybe your cat has brought a live mouse into the house in the middle of the night & played with it, without killing it, for what seems like hours? Jesus said even something as insignificant as that doesn't happen apart from the will of our heavenly Father. The display of His **lovingkindness** & care & providence is everywhere around you. & if that display is even in the world around us, how much more do we see that **lovingkindness** in the Word & in Jesus & in the gospel. We must trust Him because He's so good, so kind, so generous, & so caring. The world is full of testimonies to God's lovingkindness & as believers we want to live like that's true. As followers of Jesus we know the steadfast love, the faithful love of God personally & intimately. However, God's love is bigger & greater than that. As a matter of fact, the earth is full of God's loving care. It's present like the air we breathe. If this wasn't the case, we wouldn't survive for even a second. Because we're loved in this way, we

want to know & enjoy our God even more. Thus the stanza ends, **teach me Your statutes. Teach me** is a reoccurring theme in this Psalm (12, 26, 29, 33, 64, 66, 68, 99, 108, 124, 135, 171). It reminds us again of the importance of loving our Lord with our minds. Knowing who He is & what He's like moves us to want to know Him more. Where is such knowledge found? The answer is simple: In His Word. & when we read His revealed will for us we want to obey Him. Whether we're lying on our bed at midnight, meditating on His Word (55, 62, 147-148), fellowshiping with God's people, or taking a walk in God's creation, we love God, listen to Him, & thank Him.

The 1st vs of this stanza is full of assurance & strong resolve. The last vs overflows with a sense of God's fullness & of the psalmist's personal dependence. Those who have God for their portion long to have Him as their Teacher. Those who resolve to obey are the most eager to be taught. *I have said that I would keep Your word* is followed by *teach me Your statutes*. The Lord Himself is our portion, or as the Good News Translation says, *You are all I want, O Lord*. & our God's faithful, unfailing love fills the earth. Let's pray.