
Candid Confessions: *what happens when the Bible's reality becomes personal reality? Pt.3*

Psalm 119

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Introduction *The Big Idea: Candid confessions to God happen when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality.*

The doors opened and there she was like never before. In a dress whiter than snow with her blond hair flowing and her face aglow, Lisa my bride held on to her father's arm and began walking down the rose-pedaled isle to me. It was as though the moment had no time. The 200 people in attendance simply disappeared. Hardly, do I need to tell you the simple truth that "beauty captivates". My desire dilated and I was entranced by her entrance. Nobody poked me and said "pay attention" because attention always follows interest. And my interest was won by the one giving her life to me. Aw, just the sight of my beloved created joy. And I knew beyond all doubt that my desire of Lisa would fuel my determination to be with her all the days of my life.

Now this introduction is not about Lisa Turner although the description of her was underplayed. No, the introduction is an illustration of how beauty lays hold of attention and gives rise to determination. This introduction shifts to the object of our faith. It pivots toward the journey's end of our hope. His name is Jesus Christ. And we will see in the moments ahead what happens when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality.

This morning's message is the third and last message in a series called *Candid Confessions to God*. By spending three weeks together in Psalm 119, we begin to see that candid confessions to God happen when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality. The first week God revealed to us by his Word and through his Spirit that He is awesome! He is great. And he is good. As this bible reality became our personal reality, we found ourselves candidly confessing to God of his amazing greatness and goodness. We want to talk to him openly about him. We summarized this message in one word: PRAISE.

Last week, by Psalm 119, God through his Spirit showed us something about ourselves. We noticed that we both suffer and we sin. We hurt in a world cursed and broken. Injustice occurs. Sin comes at us like arrows from an evil one. And when we recognize who God is and where God is in the midst of the mess, we personally talk to him. We trust him. We confess that we are suffering and need his help.

We also noticed in message 2 that we are sinners. Sin not only comes at us but it also comes from us. We sin. We rebel. We drift from God. Yet, when we are confronted by God through his Word, we know our only hope is to confess our sins to God. He will save us. He will rescue us from the insanity of the drift. He has the only solution for our sin – Jesus Christ our Lord. Candid confessions to God over our suffering and sinning happen when this bible reality becomes our personal reality. We summarized this message in one word: PETITION.

Today is message 3. The title is “Candid Confessions to God of our desire and determination”. When we see the reality of God’s beauty in his Word – his irresistibility, his splendor – we cannot help but openly confess our desire for him and our determination to obey him. In other words, the big idea from today’s message is: *desire for God gives rise to determination to follow God.* (see v32). When this bible reality becomes our personal reality we confess to him our desire for him that leads to our determination to obey him. We will summarize this message in one word: PASSION

Let’s see if this is so by opening our bibles to Psalm 119. <pray>

The Psalmist’s desire for God

Part one of the message is “the psalmist’s desire for God.” In the world of Psalm 119, we find the young psalmist deeply desiring God. For example, turn in your bibles to ps.119:131-132. In these verses, we hear the writer candidly confessing to God,

I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me as is your way with those who love your name.

Here in these two verses we get a sense of both the intensity and intimacy of desire for God.

Its Intensity

1. First, take note of the intensity of desire as seen in v131. The psalmist candidly confesses, “I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments.” Notice how the author desires God’s word and how he communicates this desire personally to God. He must have God’s written revelation given to him or he feels like he will die. He desires God’s word like oxygen. The word picture he evokes is similar to yesterday when Lisa and I were out for a run. Down by the river with heavy air at mile marker 8 (or was that .8?) our mouths were open and panting for a mouthful of fresh air. We desperately needed air. V.131 gives us a word picture portraying the intensity of the desire the psalmist experiences. He, in effect, cries out, “I need your word like I need air. Take away my air and I die. Take away my bible and . . . This is desire’s intensity. There is nothing casual about it.

Its Intimacy

2. Not only in these two verses do we see the intensity of desire but notice v.132 and the reason for intensely desiring his word. This verse corrects those who say “anyone who loves the bible with this type of intensity commits bibliolatry – a worship of the bible rather than a worship of the author of the bible; God himself. Granted, there are those who make the bible into an idol and treat it superstitiously. But the psalmist certainly is not doing anything of the sort. Listen again to v.132. “Turn to me and be gracious to me as is your way with those who love your name”. He connects a desire for God’s commandments in v131 with God’s particular attention in v132. He tells God, “turn to me”. Look at me. I want your face not just your hand. I want you not simply help from you or a book by you. Isn’t that beautiful? And note how v.132 ends. “as is your way with those who love your name.” He says, “I know you God. I know your heart. You are predictable. As you always do for those who desire you intimately, turn your face to me.” So, v.132 gives us the second part of our teaching on desiring God. He

doesn't merely love his Word. The psalmist desires God's face as revealed in his Word.

By putting these two verses together, we might be able to form an exhortation for us that sounds something like this: With our whole heart—both with intimacy and intensity—desire God above all. This is what happens when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality. Candid confessions to God of our desire for him occur as we see him in the Bible.

This is not unlike what we find in the NT. For example, in John 5, Jesus said to his opposition—those who believed they were right with God because of the good things they did for God, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” (v39-40)

In the world of psalm 119, we witness God's splendor and beauty that enchants the psalmist. He cannot help but search the scriptures in order to see the Messiah in the pages of scripture. And when he catches glimpses of God he candidly confesses to God his desire for him!

What we have done up to this point is notice in ps.119 that the writer knows something about God that attracts him to God. He knows his heart. He loves his name. And this beauty lays hold of his attention. He attends with interest to the Scriptures. He seeks for God in the pages of the bible. He knows that the Scriptures bear witness about God and his Messiah – the king who will come and deliver his people from the curse of this world—somehow and in some way. He wants God to turn to him and using the words of v135, “Make your face to shine upon me.”

Your intimate and intense desire of him increases as this particular bible reality becomes your personal reality. We candidly confess to God our desire of him as we hear of him and hear from him in bible preaching, as we study and think upon him in the bible, as we are inclined to him personally and as we desire and delight in him presently. This is the bible's reality. I ask you, “is this your personal reality”?

The Psalmist's determination for God

We have seen in a sample from Psalm 119 how when the bible's reality becomes our personal reality we candidly confess to God our intimate and intense desire for him. But what has not yet been established is how determination for God is dependent upon desire for God. That is, the message began by stating the overall summary of the message like this: Desire for God gives rise to determination to follow God. Is there sufficient evidence in Ps.119 that this is so? And if so, how do desire and determination relate?

The second part of today's message is *The Psalmist's determination for God*. Turn to Psalm 119:32 for an example of both a determination for God and how desire for God relates to it.

I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart.

Let's make a few observations from this verse. In its context (vv25-32) we see a movement from grief to gladness; from dread to delight. Without expounding the entire 8 verse stanza, a simple read of vv.25-32 shows the psalmist candidly confessing to God his urgent need of the word of God and the God of the word. He desires God intensely as he pleads with him for grace. He makes mention of his determination throughout this stanza – things like “I will meditate on your wondrous works” (27) and “I will run in the way of your commandments” (32).

The “I will” sentences throughout ps.119 are plentiful.¹¹ The psalmist is determined to follow God. These statements of determination can be likened to pledges or vows. For example, in v.106 he says to God, “I have sworn an oath and confirmed it to keep your righteous rules.”

Its purpose

So, in the verse we are currently considering, v32, he tells God, “I will run in the way of your commandments.” He vows not simply to walk in his ways or saunter down his paths. He says, “I will run”! “I will exert all my energy to obey your revealed will in your Word. There will be times of trouble in which my vitality is low and my pace slow. In these seasons, under distress and temptation, my run looks different. Nevertheless, I pledge my allegiance to you. I will not stop. I will keep running and running and running on your path until that glorious day when you say, “you reached your finish line . . . and you crossed the finish line accelerating. Enter the joy of my presence.

This is the psalmist’s determination to follow God. Here in this verse we notice the psalmist’s resolve, his grit, his steadfastness to believe God in an obeying way. But merely leaving the teaching here gives only a ½ truth. Where does the psalmist get the guts to run like this? How does he keep the pace of perseverance amid suffering? What gives rise to the psalmist’s determination to follow God?

Its power

The answer is found in one word: desire. Verse 32 says, “when you enlarge my heart”. When you O God enlarge my heart I will run in the way of your commandments. Our writer tells us that once God does something for him, at the time God grants him his particular request, the psalmist will run in the way of his commandments. What does he require in order to run the race with perseverance?

He puts it this way: Enlarge my heart. Saturate my soul and marinate my mind with your wondrous self. Cause me to both recognize and relish your splendor. Make my desire of you dilate. Cause my heart to be capacious in order to treasure up more of you in my heart. Like a water balloon under a spicket, expand my heart for all of you and let it burst publicly in glad-hearted obedience.

The same Hebrew word and word picture Isaiah uses to depict how God displays his glory by changing his people and bringing them home. Listen to Isa.60:5. “Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and (here is our word) exult. It literally means, “your heart shall grow wide”. Your desire of him will undergo expansion and revel in his revealed splendor.

Concentrate now on ps.119:32. Connect these observations. This verse tells us that desire for God precedes and gives rise to determination to follow God. When our determination to obey God wanes, our desire of Him is low. BUT, when our desire for God waxes, our determination to run in his ways is strong. If we find ourselves with weak willpower it’s because our desire of him is weak. We have placed our desire on something else. We stare with hope at other things while merely assuming God. Are we surprised, then, when our determination to follow him in difficult times fades?

¹¹For a sample of the author’s determination statements see vv.16, 23, 27, 48, 93, 143, 171, 172.

I wonder if Augustine was right when he said, “The whole of a good Christian is a holy desire.”¹² When desire for God increases determination to follow him does the same.

Conclusion

Let me wrap up this message by asking you one question and then we will close in a congregational prayer.

What would life be like if you knew God better than anything and enjoyed him more than everything? How would growing desire for God shape your determination to follow him in:

- Loving your spouse when your spouse is unlovable?
- Learning from your teachers at school when your teachers are awkward?
- Participating in Chapel life when your participation goes unnoticed?
- Caring for your aging parents when your siblings appear disengaged?
- Continuing to give to your children when your children are ungrateful?
- Speaking the gospel to others when the gospel is weird to others?
- Obeying your parents when your parents seem unreasonable?
- Sacrificially giving of your time and money when your time and money are limited?
- Honoring national leaders when national leaders looks childish?

What would life be like if you knew God better than anything and enjoyed him more than everything?

Please stand with me and we will read a prayer to God. May our prayer be from our hearts. May our prayer be accompanied with faith and anticipation. May our lives live in the bible’s reality so that candid confessions to God will not end today.

You are good and do good.
I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments.
Turn to me and be gracious to me as is your way with those who love your name.
Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your Word.
Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.
I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart.
Teach me. Love me. Hold me. Guide me.
I am yours; save me.

¹²Quoted in Thomas Hand, *Augustine On Prayer*, 20.