

It's Time To Renew Your Subscription

Psalm 119:25-26

In the typical mail delivery each day, there are usually two or three items which capture my attention immediately. It happens to you, too. You are in a hurry, right? So you pick up the entire stack and quickly flip through all the advertising circulars, sweepstakes entries and bills, to get to the first class stuff. You toss the rest of it aside until you've had a chance to read that card from a good friend, or from that grandchild who lives too far away.

I confess. I'm guilty. I hardly look at anything that even looks like junk mail. If the people sending the item are really ambitious, I'll get several copies with several variations in the spelling of my name—as you can imagine. Sometimes I'll get three copies: one address to “Rocky,” which is my nickname, one to “Stanley” which is my real name, and one to “S.M.” which are my initials. Much of it goes into the trash can right away. But there was one little bulk-rate envelope which caught my attention. Printed on the front, right next to my name, were these words: “Important Renewal Information.” A glance at the return address revealed that it was from the “Subscribers Service Department” of a magazine for ministers to which I subscribed.

But I was intrigued by those words: “Important Renewal Information.” So I opened the envelope. The simple letter inside was from the Editor-in-chief, no less, and began, “It's time to renew your subscription to,” followed by the name of the magazine. I was told that the next few issues would “be extremely important” to me as a church leader, and I really wouldn't want to miss them.

But alas! My subscription was about to expire, and if the Editor-in-chief was going to continue to send me “the kind of practical, hands-on information” I had come to expect from them, I had to act quickly. They needed my “renewal instructions” right away. And since I don't have time to “bother with repeated renewal instructions,” the letter told me, I should take just a moment to check the appropriate response on the little card and send it back in the postage-paid envelope.

Slick. Convincing. Persuasive. Except for one thing. I had already decided not to renew, because that particular publication did not interest me enough to give valuable time reading it every month.

We all receive magazines and newspapers in our homes and at our places of business. Some of them we asked for and some are sent as complimentary copies. We ignore the pleas for subscription renewals for those publications we don't want, while we take the time to renew others. Some of these we have received for years, and look for them every month. Our subscription periods may be for several years, or only a few months. But if we want to continue to receive that favorite reading material, we must renew.

If we can give that much attention to simple words printed on paper, then how much more attention should we give to renewing our relationship with our Heavenly Father! How much greater priority should we give to seeing that our church is renewed!

Psalm 119 is a masterpiece in poetry, divided into twenty-two sections of eight verses each. Each of the verses in each section begins with the same Hebrew letter. That's what those funny little squiggles and strange-looking words are in some versions.

The entire psalm, all 176 verses, is about the Word of God, but each section focuses on some aspect of God's Word and its value to our lives. The theme of each of the sections is usually stated in the first or last verse of the section. An example is found in the fourth section, the one named after the Hebrew letter "*Daleth*," which begins in verse 25.

The author of Psalm 119 needed a renewal of his relationship with God, and he needed it badly. It appears as though he may have been going through one of those rough times all too common to all of us. He was experiencing pain, depression, or trouble of some other kind. Most of us can identify with his words in verse 25, "*I am laid low in the dust.*" We may not know exactly what he had in mind, but we do know that feeling very well!

And we know exactly what he meant when he said, "*My soul is weary with sorrow.*" in verse 28, or as the King James Version translates it, "*my soul melteth for heaviness.*" Translated literally, the word "melteth" means "to distill, to drop as tears from the eye." So the psalmist is saying something like "my life is leaking out of me." We've all been there before ourselves, and will be again.

No one is exempt from trouble, not even those who really have a heart for following God. So trouble is not a sign that we need renewal. But the rough places in our lives tend to wear us down faster, don't they? The psalmist needed renewal,

or to follow our earlier analogy, it was time to “renew his subscription.” From past experience, he knew how to go about it. So he turned to God. He turned back to the promises God had given him in His Word. He knew he could depend on God to come through for him, as He had numerous times in the past.

So the theme of verses 25-32 is summed up in verse 25: “*I am laid low in the dust; renew my life according to your word.*” And in keeping with his style, the theme is repeated at the end of the section, in verse 32, in different words: “*I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.*” It sounds as if God did it all.

And while we are definitely dependent on the working of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives, there are still some very positive things we must do in order to experience renewal. Just as most magazines will not send us their publications unless we respond, God will not automatically renew either us or our church unless we respond to Him and the authority of His Word.

What we are to do to experience renewal is outlined for us in verses 25-40. Before we decide to renew our subscription to a magazine or a newspaper, we have to make a conscious appraisal of the worth of that publication: is this something I want to read, or not? In the same way, before we can experience a renewal of our walk with God, we must examine that walk on several levels.

First, there must be an **evaluation** (v. 26). What is my relationship with God really like—according to His standards we find in His Word? Second, there must be **meditation** (v. 27). In other words, what does God have to say about my lifestyle, attitudes and motives?

The third level on which we must examine our walk with God is **dedication** (vv. 30-32). Am I willing to commit myself to what God says in His Word? Am I willing to obey what God says even if it’s not convenient or logical from a human standpoint?

Then the fourth level brings the other three into focus: **modification** (vv. 33-40). In the light of the evaluation of myself and my relationship with God, because of my meditation on what God says about the condition of my heart before Him, and as proof of my dedication to Him, what changes do I need to make in my lifestyle which would enable God to renew my spirit?

Today, let’s look at the first of these four in our time together:

1 Evaluation, v. 26

The first response the author of this psalm made was to take an honest look at himself and his standing before God. He wrote, *“I recounted my ways.”* The King James Version reads, *“I have declared my ways.”* He had opened up his life before God. He had scrutinized and examined his heart, his attitudes, his motives, his passions, and he had done all this with God as his witness. He probably discovered some things there which were very pretty—as would any of us.

Jeremiah 17:9 reads, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”* And Jesus Himself said, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander”* (Matthew 15:19).

Because those are the kinds of things which come from the heart, most of us resist exposure of ourselves. We don't like to dig too deeply beneath the surface, and when someone else gets too close to unmasking the real us, we get uncomfortable. This uneasy feeling we get at times like that demonstrates itself in lack of attendance, weak prayer lives, dusty Bibles, and spiritual lockjaw. We may even refuse to place ourselves into close situations where we might be stripped of the disguise.

The diagnosis must come before there can be a cure. We may attempt to diagnose ourselves by saying, “Well, I've just been busy,” and we may have been, which only disguises the real problem of our need for more of God in our lives.

Or we may say something like, “That church just doesn't feed me spiritually.” But if the only spiritual food we receive is what we might get while impatiently waiting for the sermon to end on Sunday mornings, then it's time to take another look at our relationship with God. If Christians feed themselves in the other 167 ½ hours in the week, they won't be starving when they come to the table on Sunday.

Another diagnosis we make of ourselves sometimes is that we are really okay. Sure, we are sinners, but isn't everybody? So we fool ourselves into thinking that just because everybody sins, then we aren't in such bad shape ourselves. But just listen to the fallacy of that logic. If everyone, including ourselves, contracted the AIDS virus, would that make us any healthier? Of course not.

The diagnosis of our relationship with God is that too often we are like David said in verse 25: We are *“laid low in the dust.”* Just as the dust of the ground defiles,

chokes and blinds, even so the dust of our culture swirls around us today. We are defiled too often. We are choked by the cares of living. We are blinded to God's perspective and precepts.

When we finally hear the call of God, that "it's time to renew our subscription," to rejuvenate our relationships with Him, we find that we must come to Him in confession of personal sin. We must weigh ourselves in the balances of God's Word, and determine to correct anything there which is displeasing to Him. That in turn must be followed by a stubborn resolution to follow God more closely than we have been in the past. How do we do that?

The psalmist scrutinized his heart and his ways, and realized he fell short. But he really needed and wanted to refresh his spirit and his intimacy with God. His conclusion was that he needed new and more insight into God's Word. That is why he said at the end of verse 26, "*teach me your decrees.*"

God's Word is like a mirror into which we can look to see ourselves as we really are. We cannot read the Word of God with a mask on and expect that He will make any real difference in our lives. We cannot camouflage our souls before God and expect Him to renew us. He sees right through the pretense and sham. Renewal can be found only as we open ourselves up to God and His Word in an honest evaluation of ourselves and our relationship to Him.

Check your spiritual mailbox. There just may be a letter there from your Heavenly Father, addressed to you. Isn't it time to renew your subscription to the things of God?