

The Free Heart

Psalm 119:29-32

When I say the word “summer” what images pop into your mind? Your answer might range from the end of the school year to swimming to hot weather to baseball to vacations to farming to picnics. The word “autumn” conjures up mental pictures of cooler weather, crisp apples, the colors in the trees, going back to school, the harvest, Thanksgiving and football games. When I say “winter,” you may think of Christmas, New Year’s, frost, snow, roaring fireplaces, bare trees, family gatherings, or basketball.

But what is your first thought when you hear the word “spring”? Do you think of the breezes that come in March or the rains that come in April? We might think the tender grass, the song of the birds, or the flowers that bloom only at that time of year. Easter and the Resurrection may come to mind. Or it might be spring break and the approaching end of the school year.

Whatever happens to pop into your mind first, we would probably all agree that spring is a time of renewal, as the entire created world seems to come alive again after the death of winter.

Spiritually speaking, however, which of the seasons could you use to describe your relationship with God right now? Perhaps you are feeling or have felt that period in your life which could be described as “winter,” when your very soul seemed to have been frozen in suspended animation. Your attitude about life in general is that everything is wrong. Perhaps your relationship with God is stale and flat; your spirit is suffocating from want of a breath of fresh air from God; your heart feels restricted and confined.

If that is so, there is a way to experience a spiritual springtime in your spirit. There is a way to receive that renewal you need so badly and want so much. David did not use the seasons to represent his walk with God, but he did use a rather unique expression to describe what God had done for him. But God did not do it alone—there were some things for which David was directly responsible. We are able to see the things David had to do to receive the spiritual renewal he himself needed. The same things hold true for us today.

After he came through the process of renewal, David declares in verse 32, ***“You have set my heart free.”*** Literally, the phrase is “You will enlarge my heart.” One

commentator has said that it means “To make the heart free from all hindrances to what is right; to fill it with noble and holy purposes; to stimulate and animate it.”

What a wonderful way to express that flood of renewal which bursts into a person’s life when God becomes real to him once more! But how can we experience this “free heart” for ourselves?

So far, we’ve seen that David had to pass through a level of *evaluation* (v. 26), when he examined himself before God. He who will not go through the sometimes painful process of evaluating himself before God will never know renewal in his spirit.

The second level, found in vv. 27 and 48, was that of *meditation*, as David meditated first on the *wonders of God* and then on the *Word of God*. He who will not sit in wonder before God will never know what renewal is about.

Today we come to the third level through which we must pass, a stage found in vv. 29-32. We call this one *dedication*. After David had scrutinized his life before God’s wonders and before God’s Word, perhaps he realized that he had become lackadaisical in his commitment to God and His Word. So he recommitted his life to the Lord God, and his life was impacted in four major areas. Being rejuvenated in our relationships with God, experiencing a springtime in our souls, will require a renewal in each of these areas in our lives today.

1 The first area which needs renewing is Persistence, v. 30b

The psalmist told us at the end of verse 30, “*I have set my heart on your laws.*” He had fixed his heart on the Word of God. He had anchored himself to God. He owed no allegiance to anyone else. He owed his life to none other, and as a result of what God was doing in his life, David set his heart on the things that God commanded.

On what is your heart set today? It will be something, whether good or bad, whether beneficial or harmful. Have you anchored your life to the principles and precepts of the Word of God, or are you living by a hodge-podge of personal whims and desires? Have you turned to God to see what He says about your life, or do you live by your own concocted self-philosophy?

If so, then perhaps it is time you admitted to yourself and to God that the reason your life seems so dull and stale is because you need to be renewed in the area of persistence in following after what God says, rather than after what the world says.

No one can know renewal if he is not persistent in doing what God says, regardless of the pressure put upon him to do otherwise.

Listen to these words, and see if you don't pick up on the idea of "persistence":
"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). Paul told the Thessalonians, *"Test everything. Hold to the good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The writer of Hebrews challenged, *"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess"* (4:14), and then again, *"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful"* (10:23). What these different verses in the New Testament are saying is essentially what David was saying here in Psalm 119: *"I have set my heart on your law."*

2 The second area which needs renewing is Faithfulness, v. 31

David declared to God, *"I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord."* No matter what happened, he was going to be faithful to God. There is evidence here in this psalm that David may have been under pressure to relax his standards for living just a bit. In more modern terms, his enemies—or even his friends—may have called him a fanatic because of the stance he had taken about a lot of things. It happens that way sometimes.

That kind of pressure may have been what prompted him to say in verse 19, *"I am a stranger on earth."* He pleaded in verse 22, *"Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes,"* which sounds as though his faithfulness in keeping God's Word was the very reason for the scorn and contempt. Then he said in verse 23, *"Though princes sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees."* Even the princes in the king's own court were putting pressure on David to not be so rigid in following the Laws of God.

There are other examples in this psalm. Look at verse 51: *"The arrogant mock me without restraint."* In verse 69, he said, *"Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart."* He finally exclaimed in verse 115, *"Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God!"*

We are pressured to leave behind us things that really make a difference. Our world system oftentimes makes it inconvenient to be as faithful or as dedicated as we feel we should be. There will always be someone to tell you that the Word of God is outmoded and out of date. No matter who you are or what your standard for

living is, there will always be someone to tell you that you are too strict, that you need to relax and live a little. They will say that surely God doesn't expect us to live with our heads in the sand, that He understands that we are only human, and on and on with reasoning that sounds good and makes a little sense.

Yet one thing they all overlook. We are not to compare ourselves with each other, but to the statutes of God. There are so many things out there which work to pull us away from God, most of them working in ways too subtle to be immediately recognized. The allurements of Satan are simply too fascinating. But we are to measure ourselves by what God has said, and allow His Holy Spirit to make whatever adjustments and changes are necessary. We are to learn from God's Word what He says about our lives, and we are to resolve to be faithful to what we learn.

If you really want renewal in your life, you will not find how to get it from the daily newspaper or from the emptiness of the entertainment world. You will not find it in a whirlwind of social activities or community service, however good and honorable those things may be. Renewal comes from listening carefully to what *God* says, and then being faithful to do what *He* says, no matter what *anyone else* says! "*I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord.*"

3The third area which needs renewing is that of Eagerness, v. 32

Here is something we don't see often in our day: "*I run in the path of your commands.*" Instead, what we see most of the time is a mere creeping along in the things of God. There are not too many people who exhibit that kind of readiness or passion to actually live by God's Word. The ardor and flame is missing from too many who profess to be Christians.

It is easy to become excited and enthused about a lot of things, from a touchdown or homerun, to a new grandchild or a new business deal. But how much eagerness do we exhibit when it comes to obeying God? How often do we find ourselves distracted by thinking about the precepts of God?

And how eager are we to obey what we see in the pages of the Bible? When David said, "*I run in the path of your commands,*" he was saying that he was eager to go down God's way, rather than any other path he might have chosen. But aren't we too often reluctant to obey God in simple faith? Don't we too often try to figure things out ourselves? That is exactly why we are in need of renewal today. We have not been eager enough when it has come to following after God.

Now so far, we've looked at three areas which need attention in our lives at the level of dedication to God: **persistence, faithfulness and eagerness**. But there is one other area which makes these three possible. I may be **persistent, faithful** and even **eager** to follow God for a time, but unless I have given attention to this fourth area, I will be no more than a shooting star in the skies of the Kingdom.

4This fourth area which needs renewal is Choice, vv. 29-30a.

If I am going to be dedicated to God, then I must *choose* to be dedicated to God. David prayed, "*Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.*" Then, in contrast to those "deceitful ways" he shunned in v. 29, he declared in verse 30, "*I have chosen the way of truth...*" Even though he needed the kind of renewal which comes only from God, still there was something David was responsible for. There was something David had to *choose* to do.

Each of us is responsible for our own choices. And regardless of the shapes those decisions take, they can be boiled down into only two basic alternatives. Either we choose "*deceitful ways*" or we choose "*the way of truth.*" One leads to death—the other leads to life.

When David prayed that God would keep him from deceitful ways, he could have meant ways we are not honest and upright with others, or it could mean ways by which we deceive ourselves.

In His awesome wisdom, God has created us so that we are free to choose which way our lives shall go. While we may be influenced for good or evil, no one forces either of the ways upon us. We cannot claim that we are forced into one or the other by circumstances, poverty, affluence, busy schedules, illness, pain, disappointment, inheritance or peer pressure.

The matter of free choice is one of the qualities which sets us above and apart from other creatures. So after we have gone through the evaluation of v. 26, we begin to see that our spiritual decline has been the result of too many bad choices.

Good choice or bad, right decision or wrong, still we are held accountable. Dr. Willard Krabill, writing in *Our Family* magazine in Canada, said, "Those who are mentally and emotionally healthy are those who have learned when to say Yes, when to say No, and when to say Whoopee!" You see, each of us has the freedom to choose between right and wrong, and between what is good for us and what has the potential for harm. We each have the power to decide whether or not we will be happy or sad. The choice is left to us.

Viktor Frankl was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist of Jewish descent. In September of 1942, he, his wife and parents were sent to one of the Nazi concentration camps. When he got out of the concentration camp, he wrote a book which was entitled, "Saying Yes to Life In Spite of Everything." Knowing that he survived three years in a concentration camp makes us believe he knew a thing or two about his subject! When that book was translated into English, it was given the title, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he wrote:

"We who have lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances—to choose one's own way."

But those who write from a Christian perspective are just as strong in their belief that we can choose the way we will go. The main difference is that Christian authors realize there are basically only two choices. Alexander MacLaren said, "A man who has not learned to say 'No'—who is not resolved that he will take God's way, in spite of every dog that can bay or bark at him, in spite of every silvery voice that woos him aside—will be a weak and a wretched man till he dies."

Oswald Chambers wrote, "The power of individual choice is the secret of human responsibility." He also observed, "I am at liberty to choose to try every independent plan of my own, but I shall find in the end...that what God said I had better do at the beginning was the right thing, if only I had listened to Him."

Have you made any choices in your life which have pulled you away from God? If you are in need of a spiritual refreshing today, it probably is because you have made too many bad choices in your life. What choices have you made regarding Christ? Have you chosen to follow Him, or reject Him?

Have you chosen to allow Him to be Lord of your life, or are you still trying to be in control? Have you chosen to adopt an apathetic approach to spiritual things, withholding yourself from God until your back is in a corner? Your heart will never be set free in spiritual renewal until you decide once and for all who this man Jesus really is. Or have you put off deciding at all?

Each of us has to make our own choice. One woman told of going to a hotel dining room with her husband. They read that the special of the day included a "choice of

vegetables.” The woman asked what the vegetables were, and the waitress replied, “Asparagus.” So the woman asked, “But what is the choice?” The waitress replied, “Do you want it or don’t ‘cha?”

That is the basic choice we must make about Christ and about renewal: do we want Him or don’t we?

Moses once described the choices the Hebrew people had as they were ready to cross the Jordan into Canaan. He said to them, *“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live”* (Deuteronomy 30:19). The same two choices were in front of them, as they are in front of us. They had the power to choose, just as we do. Will we choose our own way, or will we choose the way of Christ?

C. S. Lewis once wrote: *“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.”* Oswald Chambers said, “A man must believe in Jesus Christ by a deliberate determination of his own choice.”

So today, while it is still called “Today,” make the choice that no one else can make for you—choose Christ!

God can set your heart free! He can give you a spiritual springtime, a renewal of your spirit, a rejuvenation of your relationship with Him. But you must choose whether or not that is what you really want. You can be as close to God as you want to be.