

Confirmation Message – April 3, 2022 –
A New Heart
From Psalm 119 – Xema Whitley

I invite you to listen to some ancient words from Psalm 119 and search them for what they could mean for you today:

Verse 105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path

Verse 114: You are my refuge and my shield. I have put my hope in you.

Verse 89-90a: Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Your faithfulness continues through all generations...

We've had a strange, wild ride for Confirmation this year, I think.

- Remember when we walked and prayed at the labyrinth at the OSU campus? I was impressed with your insights when we talked about that experience together.
- Remember when you first met your mentors? I was grateful that members of Maple Grove were willing to invest time, energy and prayer into your journeys.
- Remember when we served as “elves” at the Christmas Free Store? My heart was proud to see you graciously helping others as they shopped gifts for their families.
- Remember when we had to pivot and have class by Zoom? I felt grateful for your willingness to learn and share your drawings related to various scenes of church history.
- Remember when we had a retreat at Good Works? Just kidding – remember when Ohio's weird weather forced us to CANCEL the retreat at Good Works?
- Remember when we had the Lock In to make up for the retreat we didn't have? No ???– you can't remember it because it's still something to look forward to – June 3-4th. I see fun games at church in your future and the joy of serving in Central Ohio.

Here's my main point: I am looking forward to making MORE and MORE memories with you.

Because SERVING and LEARNING with wonderful young people like you renews my heart and faith.

Did you know that simply by SHOWING UP to Confirmation, others have been encouraged?

That's the POWER of YOU – the power God has given you that JUST in SHOWING UP, you can bring others light and hope.

YOUR FAITHFULNESS can impact generations that have come before you AND generations that come after you.

Some of you have chosen to be confirmed today – some of you have said “ I need to wait and think and learn a bit more.” All of you have listened to your heart and I respect that. Sometimes life gets so busy and overwhelming, we don't take time to slow down and listen to our hearts. Sometimes our hearts can feel old, tired and broken no matter what age we are. So why is the title of this message A NEW HEART? Because, as you know already, there are times in our lives our hearts are disappointed, crushed and even broken. Yes- even when we choose the path of Christian and follow in the footsteps of Jesus, our hearts can become sad and discouraged.

Think about this for a second – how many times in your life have you wished you could start over – take back the words you said – choose a different action or doorway to walk through?

Where do you go when it feels like your heart has a glitch...?

where do you go for a Heart-Re-Boot, a Heart Tune Up? I know you talk to good friends, family members – but I'm here to remind you that you can always go to the One who Created your heart in the first place to help you feel renewed. I chose the three scriptures from Psalm 119 at the beginning to help show you how to do it. Listen again to what this clever poet said in Psalm 119 which is 176 verses long!!!! Don't worry, I only chose three to focus on.

1) Verse 105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path

- In the notes in my study Bible, it says Psalm 119 is a LOVE POEM TO GOD's LAW.
- Now laws may not seem like the thing that would inspire a big long love poem, but this author sees God's Love through God's laws.

- The poet sees the laws as protecting us from doing wrong, giving us wisdom and making new life flow through us. I agree with this poet that when life becomes frightening and out of control, you can look to God's word for comfort and confidence.
- You will be getting an AWESOME Wesley Study Bible today and I'm telling you, if you put in the effort, you WILL find light for your path from it. And even if you're not a reader, look up the Bible online with options to listen to it. Find what works for you.

2) **Verse 114: You are my refuge and my shield. I have put my hope in you.**

- When your heart needs a safe place to hide and heal for a while, go to God. Find out what prayer and meditation means to you.
- That may mean listening to a podcast about prayer or meditation while you walk or draw or color.
- It could mean finding an app that guides you in prayer or scripture everyday – just like brushing your teeth.
- It could mean running, listening to music that calms and quiets your soul. God is a creative God – there are so many ways to explore prayer.
- When your heart is aching, listen to it as a call to go deeper with God so you can find that hope that only God can provide.

3) **Verse 89-90a: Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.**

Your faithfulness continues through all generations...

- So far, my advice to you on this path is to read the Bible, find ways to pray & meditate and the third one is::::: WORSHIP & SERVE – go in confidence knowing our God is steadfast and eternal – with this confidence go and serve others to renew yourself.
- Here is what I know after following this Jesus person for several decades – as you faithfully serve others, your heart is strengthened and renewed and that multiplies out to more generations.
- Invest in others and the investment will return to you in health, peace and well-being. Remember what I said at the beginning – just YOUR PRESENCE is enough to encourage others – just showing up in WORSHIP – whether you feel like it or not – will bring blessing to your own heart AND to others.

READ, PRAY, WORSHIP & SERVE

To wrap this up, I formed an ACROSTIC to help us remember what we've talked about today. An ACROSTIC IS a poem, word puzzle or other composition in which certain letters in each line form a word or words. In fact, Psalm 119 itself IS AN ACROSTIC where each line of each stanza begins with a letter from the Hebrew alphabet! So I worked on this on Friday and here's what I came up with:

“WORPS” – that's not inspiring me, then I thought of...

“PRAWS” – for Pray, Read (and)Worship, Serve – still doesn't sound right

Then I found it....

“SPRAW”- if I add an L there's a real word – and I think God is ALL for laughter – so let's add an L to the word for God's gift of Laughter and we get SPRAWL

That means to spread the arms and legs out carelessly in an untidy way while sitting or lying down...think of when your dog or cat is REALLY relaxed and on its back with all its legs spread way out – A true SPRAWL is when you are letting everything go and feel you are in a safe space to do it.

By the way, the Urban Dictionary has a slightly different definition for the word sprawl, but we don't need to use that one.

Let's see how we can use SPRAWL to help us remember to go to God when our hearts hurt.

- Imagine yourself taking your hurting heart to God and just collapsing in front of God - really trusting like the definition says – with arms and legs spread out carelessly...without fear because you are in a safe space with God.
 - Imagine what it feels like to go to God with your pain and SPRAWL out letting yourself FEEL all your emotions and letting God pick up

the pieces. Then sit quietly and sense what your next step needs to be:

- To Serve?
- To Pray?
- To Read?
- And/or
- To Worship?
- To Laugh?

The last words John Wesley was said to speak before he died were these: “The best of all – is God is with us.” Those words mean a lot to me, and I hope something I’ve shared today can mean a lot to you. Through all life’s trials, I’ve come to this conclusion: There are no guarantees in life except this: God loves us and God is with us through it all. SPRAWL out in God’s love and let your heart be made new and healed.

AMEN