The Lord’s Hand-Crafted Instrument

Text: Psalm 119:73-80

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**Scriptures:** 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; Psalm 119:73-80

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 98, 533, 175, 501, 531+532

Series: Psalm 119

Theme: God uses faithful human instruments for good

Proposition: In Christ, be a mighty instrument in God’s hands

**Introduction**

In a synagogue an instrument/tool is used to follow the words in a Torah scroll. It is a tiny hand with a pointing finger carefully, finely, crafted from silver or wood. Use of this instrument prevents damage to the pages of Scripture from greasy or dirty human fingers. The pointer is called a “Yad” because the word ‘hand’ in Hebrew is “Yad”. It begins with the Hebrew letter “Y”: Yodh.

Psalm 119 is an ‘acrostic’ psalm. “Y” is 10th letter and verses 73-80 are the tenth section of the psalm. Each of the eight lines begins with ‘Y’. First word is “Yadeka” – ‘your hands’. God is Spirit. He has no physical body parts. The language here is an anthropomorphism –from anthropos – man +morphe – form or shape... “in the form of man”. An anthropomorphism is a figure of speech which applies human characteristics to God e.g. God’s eyes, ears, hands, feet.

In our text, the psalmist is a human creature made by God. Verse 73 reads “*Your hands made me and fashioned me; Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments”.* He is a child of God. He knows of God’s covenant love. As we’ll see in this section of Psalm 119, he is also an instrument in the hand of God. Like the Yad pointer to God’s word. He points people to the commandments, precepts, testimonies of His Lord.

The same is true for each one of us, individually crafted by the hand of God. Each one of us is ‘*fearfully and wonderfully made*’ (Psalm 139:14). If we, like the psalmist, delight in the Word of God we are also like him in that he is an instrument in the hands of God to point three different groups of people to the truth:

1. The proud – those who are arrogant
2. The reverent – those who fear God
3. Ourselves – the pointer himself points himself to God.
4. **God’s Instrument for the proud (v78)**

This psalm is a prayer by a man who knows God: v73a “*Your hands made me and fashioned me”;* v75 “*I know, O LORD, that Your rules are righteous*”. In the previous Teth section, v69, we learn that the psalmist has been attacked, not with swords or spears, but worse still with words: “*The insolent smear me with lies*”. They have covered, plastered, the psalmist with falsehood. Imagine being covered in malicious graffiti full of slander and evil gossip. In verse 70 he writes “*Their heart is unfeeling like fat”.* Like a Sumo wrestler in a blow-up suit who has no feeling. This speaks of a ‘seared conscience’ (1 Tim 4:2). A hardness of heart which has become calloused (Eph 4:19). A heart which has not been softened by the power of the word (Isaiah 6:9-10).

The arrogant, the proud, the godless are the subject of the petition in verse 78 *“Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts*”. The prayer is that shame may be heaped up upon those who have been crooked and deceptive.

Is this retaliation, this vengeance, being vindictive? No. The petition here is that the godly presence of the man who quietly meditates on the truth of God’s word will be used by the Lord as an instrument to bring the proud to shame. Shame is “a painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dis-honouring”. Shame can be experienced when making a very public mistake or perhaps coming last in a race or failing an important exam.

The prayer here is that the proud, who are afflicting the psalmist, will experience/feel their guilt before God so thatthey may fear the Lord and turn to Him. God’s has chosen to use His hand-crafted instruments, His people, for the proud and the wicked: Through godly suffering at the hands of the proud, those who fear the Lord point to their Creator and Redeemer:

Think of Steven: *And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law*” (Acts 6:12-13).

Think of Christ: *“Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward”* (Matt 26:59-60)*.*

If the Lord allowed His own glorious, beloved son to be shamed as His perfect human instrument, should we be surprised if we suffer lies, deceit, and hurt from the proud and arrogant? Brothers and sisters, the Lord encourages us to be willing instruments in His hands: “*But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:14-16).* Pray that the Lord would help you to overcome evil with good as you serve Christ as a willing instrument of your Creator.

1. **God’s Instrument for the Reverent (v74 & v79)**

A knife is a tool which can be used as an instrument of war to wound and to take life. Yet the same blade can be used in the skilful hand of a surgeon to bring healing and wholeness. So, it is with God’s word, the gospel, has a two-fold nature. *“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life”(2 Cor 2:15-16).* God’s human instruments are pointers for the proud and also for those who have a reverent fear of the Lord

Notice that there are two petitions for this God-fearing group: v74&79 *v74 “May those who fear You see me and be glad, Because I wait for Your word.”* The psalmist desires to be a source of gladness, of rejoicing. The request here is that God would make the person who visibly waits on the Lord, patiently following His ways, a source of joy. That God’s people would smile and experience deep joy at knowing a person whose trust is visibly in the Lord. We were glad last year to see so many baptisms and professions of faith, so much growth both in number and maturity within this congregation. This was a source of joy for us as a congregation.

We read in the book of Proverbs that “*A wise son makes a father glad*” (Prov 15:20). Christ brought gladness to His Father’s heart: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased*" (Matt 3:17).

Faithful Brothers and sisters in our Lord, do you know how much joy you bring to others!!! You are instruments to point others to the joy of the Lord. The dying saint, the exhausted gospel-worker, the servant of the Lord who is gracious under fire, waiting on the Lord. Just as a magnet attracts, popular people pull a crowd, God’s instrument is attractive. The psalmist doesn’t want a following for himself, but he does want to draw God’s people in.

Look at *verse 79 “May those who fear You turn to me, even those who know Your testimonies”.* He wants to be a witness, an instrument, a pointer. “Look at me” …not for who I am in myself, but for who I am in the Lord! Christ’s will for us, brothers and sisters, is that others would turn towards us so that we can point them to Him! As Jesus said, *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).* The Apostle Paul understood that He was God’s instrument for God’s people. He wrote to the Corinthians: “*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor 11:1).

You could say it this way: “Turn to me so that I can direct you to Jesus”. “Look at my life. Whilst it is certainly not perfect, I have been blessed in my marriage, family, church life, I have peace in my soul. I desire to seek first the kingdom of God”. God is pleased to use us brothers and sisters as ‘jars of clay’ who contain the treasure of the gospel so that we can show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor 4:7). God is also pleased to use us as instruments for ourselves, which brings us to our third point.

1. **God’s Instrument for You (v75)**

As we’ve seen, the Lord uses his people as instruments. Like someone might use a scalpel, a torch, or a loudspeaker. He does so both for the proud and for the humble in Christ. This is a profound work of God’s surpassing grace; that the gospel is brought through human means.

What is perhaps even more astounding is that the Lord uses us as instruments on ourselves, as we live for Him, our own lives point us to Him! Look at verse 75 *“I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have* afflicted *me.* Affliction is “*the state of being in grievous pain*”. The root Hebrew word translated ‘affliction’ literally means “bowed down, humbled”.

Edith Schaeffer, wife of Francis, co-founder of L’Abri, in her book simply titled “Affliction” wrote: *“Affliction must be recognized as something we all need to deal with. There is no place to go for a vacation from the abnormality of the universe, from the effects of the Fall upon every area of life, and from the conflict of the ages. Persecution and affliction are a normal part of the Christian life”.*

Suffering draws us closer to the God who allows us to suffer for His glory and for our good. Some, but by no means all, suffering is the Lord’s discipline: “*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.* (Hebrews 12:11). All suffering is used by the Lord to draw us closer to Him, to detach us further from relying on this world.

Christ, without sin, in His humanity grew as His Heavenly Father used the suffering that He experienced in body and soul for his progress: ***“****Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation”* (Heb 5:8-9). How much more then, you and I who are not without sin. When we suffer whilst trusting in God, He uses us to point ourselves to Him.

Suffering and difficulty hurt, especially when we are not loved, not cared for, not comforted or encouraged by others. It sounds like this was the situation for our psalmist: *v76 O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, According to Your word to Your servant. v77 May Your compassion come to me that I may live, For Your law is my delight.* The Word of God is a healing balm, a soothing remedy. Sometimes in this life this is the only comfort we receive. All else is stripped away. Then God alone upholds us.

The end of the ‘YODH’ section, goes back to shame: “*May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame!*” (v80). As we have seen shame is humiliation; a loss of standing. When shamed we become an object of contempt. Think of Christ on the cross fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah: “*as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*” (53:3). Christ, who knew not sin, became sin – shameful in the sight of His Heavenly father.

The psalmists’ the concern is not shame before men, women or children, but before God Himself. The desire of the psalmist is to be blameless, but He is not. Just as you and I are not. I hope that you are ashamed if, and when:

* You have outbursts of anger
* You speak evil with your mouth and pull others down
* When husbands do not love their wives tenderly
* When wives do not honour their husbands
* When children do not obey their parents willingly

That shame is an awareness of complete vulnerability before God: “*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge*” (Psalm 51:3-4). The Word of God is living and active and as we consider ourselves, in the perfect light of God we see who we really are we can pray the words of verse 80: *May my heart be blameless in Your statutes, So that I will not be ashamed.*

The desire not to be ashamed before God is a desire for Christ. Christ Himself is the perfect pointer “*He is the image of the invisible God*” (Col 1:15). The anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament, like the ‘hands of God’ are superseded by the incarnation of Christ; the God-man with a physical body. Christ pointed others to God. He was the ultimate instrument in the hands of God. “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9).

He calls us, Brothers and sisters to be hand-crafted pointers to Himself. As He said to His disciples “*You will be my witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). We are called to be witnesses to the insolent, the proud who openly rebel against God. We are called to be witnesses to the reverent who love the Lord We are called to witness the grace and truth of God to ourselves, especially when we suffer and when we are alone.

Can you say with the psalmist “*Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments*” (v73)?

AMEN