

Season 5, Episode 5: Hiding the Word in our Hearts: A Conversation with Hunter Beless

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Sarah: This podcast is sponsored by 10offthose.com. 10offthose.com handpick the best Christian books that point to Jesus and sell them at discounted prices. Friends, We're taking a pause in our verse by verse study of Psalm 119 today, and we've got a slightly longer episode to think through a little more deeply what it looks like to hide the word in our hearts. We're delighted to be able to welcome Hunter Beless onto the podcast to help us to do that. Hunter is the founder of the Journey Women Podcast and has just released a children's book called Read It, See It, Say It, Sing It, all about the value of memorizing scripture as a family. It was such a joy to talk with Hunter about biscuits, about hardships, about Psalm 119, and what it looks like to keep looking to God's word in the ups and downs of life. We really hope you enjoy the episode, and we pray it will help you to keep thinking through what it looks like to drive Psalm 119 into your own heart. Well, that's all from me for now. Let's kick off our conversation.

Felicity: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm in the States, and this is my sister Sarah. She's over in the UK. And this episode we're delighted to have Hunter Beless on with us, who is in the States as well, in northwest Arkansas. Hi, Hunter. Great to have you with us.

Hunter: I am so delighted to be with you, too. You're two of my favorite podcast hosts, so thank you for asking me to join you today.

Felicity: Well, we're so pleased to have you, Hunter. For those of you who don't know Hunter, she is host of a brilliant podcast called Journeywomen, which Sarah and I have both been enjoying for a few years. She is in northwest Arkansas with three kids, a husband, and plowing on for the glory of the Lord, as far as I can make out. Does that sound about right, Hunt? Anything we should be adding into that intro?

Hunter: Plowing is such an appropriate verb for what my days feel like. I love it. Thank you. That's perfect.

Sarah: But you're not actually a farmer, let's just get that clear.

Hunter: Not actually a hunter either. Okay.

Sarah: Hunter, do you like tea and biscuits at all? I mean, how do you guys work? Coffee? Tea.

Hunter: So I do love tea. I really love tea. I was so proud of myself when you guys messaged me on Instagram and told me that I had a proper kettle. Thank you.

Felicity: That is a triumph, an unusual thing.

Hunter: So I do love tea. I'm really enjoying right now hernia and son's teas. No, they'll be nowhere near the quality of tea that you drink, but for me, it's a little bit bougie.

Felicity: Very good.

Hunter: Bougie?

Sarah: What does that mean?

Felicity: Is that a dialect, like a farming dialect down there?

Hunter: Typical tea that you would pick up at Walmart here. It's the tea that you would have to go buy at Target, the higher.

Felicity: Class kind of tea. Well, I think as soon as you add and suns onto something, it kind of goes up, doesn't it?

Hunter: It's not the loose leaf tea, though. I have not graduated to that yet. Is that what you guys drink and enjoy?

Felicity: I do, actually, sometimes when I'm feeling it my most classy.

Hunter: And as far as the biscuit goes, I really tried to research this, you guys. I really wanted to come to the table, like, prepared to offer my favorite biscuit. But as you know, biscuits in America or in the United States of America are nothing compared to what you

know. And I just thought, I'll make such a fool of myself if I even try and pretend. And so I was prepared. I've heard you describe, like, the point of a biscuit on the show in the past, like it's to be something sweet, to be enjoyed, kind of almost like a cookie. And so I thought, well, what if I made my own cookies? And I thought, you know what? I'm just going to get one of my kids Rice Krispy Treats. How am I trying to save it for this chat? But I couldn't. I ate the whole thing while I was waiting for my Pete brew.

Felicity: I love that. I love that. The rice Krispie treat underrated. I think it's definitely got greatness, great accomplishment.

Sarah: Cup of tea, I'd say. Yeah. Alongside journey women podcast. You've also just released your first book, haven't you? Can you tell us a bit about that and what drove you to do it? What's the heart behind it?

Hunter: Yeah. Thank you. Well, I just released my first book, as you said. It's called? Read it, see it, say it, sing it. The longest title of all time. But I hope that phrase, that refrain, is repeated throughout the book. And really the hope is that people would walk away from the book with a desire to read and intake the truth of God's Word whenever they can, however they can. Whether they read it, see it, say it or sing it, whatever they do, however they can, just to get the truths of God's Word down into their hearts. Because it's the only thing that has the power to change us, right? It helps us fight sin. It comforts our hearts and it reminds us of God's promises. It helps us to know and love God more. And because in it, we learn to delight in the life that Christ offers us. So that's my hope behind the book. The story of Scripture points us to one thing, as I say in the book, that Jesus can save us and that he is our king. So I hope that it'll encourage readers, whether young or old, to draw near to Christ in his word.

Felicity: Nice.

Sarah: And it's such a great book. I said to the other day, I enjoyed giving it to a friend, Theresa, and it's just wonderfully illustrated it's for kids. But to be honest, we sat there reading it for ourselves. We needed it as much as the kids. We wanted our kids to hear it. And it's just yes. I just think you've done such a great job with that. It's a real blessing, and I'm sure it'll be a real blessing for many people.

Felicity: I love the heart. The heart behind it is just incredible. Hunter but that is exactly what we need, isn't it? And we talk about that a lot on this podcast. But to kind of get to the point where you're thinking that is where it's at, hiding the Word in our hearts, that that's where we know the life that we have in Christ and we want to be using the Word in all of those ways in order to keep going to battles in all those ways. Can you share something of your context that kind of brought you or brings you to that conclusion that you get to the point of seeing the need for the Word as your refuge? How do you get to that point?

Hunter: I'd think as many of us do, I just saw the need for it in my own life. And really after coming to faith in Christ when I was a young child, sitting on the pew of my home church, where I just felt the weight of my sin, maybe for the first time, and just acknowledged my need for a savior and then turned and trusted in Christ, in that moment, I really knew I needed to be reading the Bible. And I did. I regularly was reading the Bible and turning to God in His Word. But when I became a high school student, I started to acknowledge that, wow, if I continue to feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit as I read God's word, then I'm not going to be able to in. Good. Conscience act in line with what I know my peers would require of me or how they would want me to act in order to be approved of by them. And so I made a conscious decision. This is one of the great heartaches of my life, to just set my Bible aside because I did not want to feel conviction when I read it. And so I went for four years where I really only referenced the Word when I was sitting in church on a Sunday morning with my family. And those were some of the darkest years of my life. I just was despairing. I mean, increasingly so, so interesting to see. Like, the further I got from time spent in God's Word, it was like I was going downhill. It just was worse and worse and worse until I hit the bottom. I really did. I really hit the bottom and did not even know if I really believed in God. And by God's grace, there was a really tragic accident that happened in my life that drew me to the Word, caused me to reckon with the brevity of life, and left me asking really big questions like, okay, God, who are you? Are you really who you say you are? And I knew enough to turn to the Word to really inquire like, is God who he says he is? And so I started to ask that question as I opened the pages of my Bible, like,

okay, God, would you show me if you really are who you say you are? As I read His Word, it's interesting because I kind of ask a similar question when I open my Bible now. Like, who are you, God? And what does this text say about who God is? The Lord used that to help me understand this isn't just a book about what will help us live rightly. This is a book about this big story about what God's doing throughout all of Redemptive history. And it leads us to a person. And so it's not just like, I need to read this book because I want to be good, but I need to read this book because I know I'm not good. I know how much I need Christ and I know how much I need the Gospel. I did not understand that prior to setting the Bible aside. And I think that's really been part of my heartbeat, even in just helping kids get a grasp on that, is like this. But we don't love this book to love the book. We love the book to love the person. And it leads us to the person of Jesus Christ. And through the Word, we get to have grown our relationship with Him. It's a relational activity. You know, that's a checkoff.

Felicity: I think, as we've been in some 119 that's one of the things that Sarah and I've talked about quite a lot together, is that it's not about loving the Word. It's about loving the person who is seen in the Word. And as we love the person more, so the Word becomes the kind of the heartbeat behind that person. Yeah, absolutely. But what about the kind of the ups and downs? So the way that you're speaking there, and that's just a beautiful journey you've described, and it's kind of ended on a high, like, this is it. We're in the Word and we love the Word. But is it always like that? What about the ups and the downs? Like, because I don't know about you, but my heart can undulate like this all the time.

Sarah: I think also we're thinking through what it looks like to live out and pray through this arm, aren't we? And I think so many people's first associations of this arm are, well, I'm not like that. I can't say what he's saying, and I think we've unpacked in the last few weeks. But actually, no, this is a sinner saved by grace in this arm. He's writing this arm. But still the ups and downs of our desires. We want to be in the Word, but my heart keeps raying, tell us something of what that feels like for you in the kind of just living the Christian life.

Hunter: Yeah, I think the Psalmist in this particular chapter, man, he says it so well, you know, like when he's confessing his need for help. And that's not something we think about initially whenever we turn to Psalm 119. But he's saying, Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction. Like, his eyes feel closed, like he's trying to understand it. He's having a hard time. He's saying, teach me, Lord, the meaning of your statutes. Help me understand your instruction. He feels like I often do when I come to the word foggy brain. Maybe I'm having a hard time getting a grasp on the message that the original authors were seeking to communicate. Lord, help me. So I think there's just so much solidarity there. I think confessing, like I don't understand or confessing I don't desire, like, God's word right now. I think of another Psalm where it says, oh, I'm trying to reference it. Hold on, guys, hold on. Restarting me. The joy of my salvation oftentimes. I was just talking with my Bible study about this last night. Okay, guys, would you pray for me? Because I know the joy that I have in the Gospel, and yet I'm not feeling it as I go about my day, when my day starts before 07:00 a.m. And I'm having to already administer discipline with my kids to correct. I'm not able to sit and delight in the reality of the Gospel. I'm going to have to figure out how am I going to do this with the chaos swirling around me. And so I think confessing that to the Lord and confessing that to other believers and then asking for help. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow in your understanding and then also ask your friends. Interestingly, after I kind of confess that to my Bible study, I had an older lady, and I could cry just talking about it, who walked up after and she said, well, what can I do to help? I was just, wow, I wish. I know not everybody has someone like that in their Bible study. But you know what a gift it is to know that my sisters are praying for me when I don't desire God's word that he would give me. A heart for it and then that they can check in with me and ask and kind of help hold me accountable through those seasons where I may not be turning to God's word as quickly as I want.

Felicity: And that's so helpful to hear that kind of honesty of confessing it. And actually, it's okay to say that that's how we feel, and the Psalms are so helpful on that. And I love, as you say in Psalm 119. We get him. He's asking all the time, isn't he? I don't think I've noticed that until I read it really closely recently. That kind of this thing is just peppered with requests for God to help. And that is so bold, isn't he?

Sarah: He's so bold in that there's no qualms, there's no kind of shyness. He's like, Teach me, give me, cause me to understand, show me, lead me. Yes. I'm not that bold. And I need to be, especially when we're not desiring. It like, actually, Lord, just give me that heart.

Felicity: And I wonder whether there's a kind of and we hear the urgency in what he's saying because he gets it. He's like, this is absolutely what I need. And I wonder whether I lack urgency sometimes because I'm kind of thinking there's another way, like just dithering around when actually coming to the Lord, as you say, hunter and being honest about that.

Hunter: Absolutely. A prior acknowledgement of our need, a knowledge of our need. It's like he knows he needs it so much. And that kind of goes back to what I was saying. It's like instead of going to the Word to be good, knowing we need it because we're not good, like we need God's Word, we need to be instructed by it. And so I think that's another great prayer to ask for it, to help us know our need for it when we don't desire it.

Felicity: Definitely.

Sarah: And I think something that's really kind of coming out as we go through this psalm as well is just, you know, this is someone living amidst big pressure. Like, he's got pressure on him from outside. He's got pressure in his own heart. This is man, a man of sorrow is writing this psalm in many ways, like he is suffering. And that often distills our needs, isn't it? I think we can all say that in times of hardship, that kind of distills our need. And so you've been really transparent over on Instagram about what a tough time the last few months and a million years have been in terms of grief and transition. I just wondered whether you could just talk us through a little about what it looked like to feed on the Word in times of hardship.

Hunter: Yeah, just to fill the listeners in a little bit. We moved. That was a real heartache for me. I left a community that we've really grown to love in New England, and we moved 36 hours away to the kind of middle of the United States. And so we left not knowing exactly what God was doing in that move, not necessarily seeking to move to this particular location. What's interesting about it is a few months later, my dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and we were able to be a lot closer to my family because of that move. So it's amazing to see God's hand over and above all things, these little heartaches and hardships that I was experiencing on a micro level. Well, then my dad passed away three weeks and one day later, the same day that he went on hospice, my grandmother went on hospice. My grandmother passed away a few months later. And so it's been a season of grief for me. Certainly just in feeling really disrupted with the move and then also feeling like just my sense of family and all of that was kind of disrupted with death. I got so many books, you guys of course, if you listen to Journey Women, I know all the good authors, so I'm ordering every good book that I can on suffering. And I'm telling you, there was no book that had any impact on me other than God's word during that season. I couldn't read any other book, and there was nothing like it. It was amazing because no matter what book I opened, you think about you have to, when you're in grief, be in the Psalms like you reference Felicity or you want to be in limitations, something that's going to speak to you in your grief. But what I found is that as I was studying, even a book like Philippians, which is not your classic kind of go to grieving text, that the Lord used that just to remind me that I am not the only one experiencing hardship and transition. I mean, the author in that book, Paul, is imprisoned, and he is writing to encourage other believers, even though he's in my family. Like, all this went through all this, but I'm not in prison without any other believers or Christian community around me. And here he is in his time of imprisonment, writing to encourage the saints. I'm not the only one experiencing hardship and transition. In fact, this is the way of the Christian life. That's what Scripture reminded me as I was regularly opening the pages like, wow, actually, God's been doing this in the lives of his followers. He's allowed these things in the lives of his followers throughout the text. And so I'm so encouraged to see his care for them. And the way in which he was using all of those things to bring about his purpose, that encouraged me that, wow, what I'm going through right now also has purpose, and so I can trust Him. So, yeah, no other book has the power to divide soul and spirit and discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. So for sure, best book you could ever read.

Felicity: I love that, and I love what you're saying about you're not the only one suffering. And that's not to say you're not saying, oh, look sideways, I should be fine because other

people are fine, but actually, because you're not the only one who has suffered or is suffering, God speaks into your situation because you're not outside of the norm in that kind of sense. God speaks to all of humanity. The Word is relevant to the grieving heart as much as to the joyful heart, as much to the whatever, the apathetic heart, whatever it might be. I think that's a really good thing to cling onto, isn't it? And so we go to the Word, expectant that God will speak to our hearts wherever we're at. What a book to be reading in the midst of Greek Philippians. Wow. Joy for the sadness.

Hunter: I didn't remember thinking, wow, I'd seen Melissa Kruger has a study on it called Joy. And I'm like, really? We're going to go to the Joy book? But it was so great and it did. It caused me to sink down into a deeper joy. And that was your and I guess.

Sarah: What you've been with the book that you've written, just thinking about Scripture memory and just holding fast to the Word as it's already in your heart, as it's already in your mind, that's another way. When we're in seasons where we actually have energy, as you say, to kind of read the books or even just to read the Word in the way that we want to, holding on to Scripture that you've already got plowed away in your head is a gift for sure.

Hunter: So when you're in that moment where you're laying on your kids floor holding his hand because he won't go to sleep for an hour after you move because you're scared of being in a new location or whatever, you can kind of rehearse the truth of Scripture. Even in that time period, my dad was dying, and it's like, okay, so just giving you access to the very words of God when you need the most. And I think that's the beauty of Scripture memory. It helps us kind of get those things down into our heart in a way where, yeah, we're going to reach for them in the moments we need the most.

Felicity: So we've kind of been dipping in and out of some 119 as we've been going through this conversation, but let's go to town on some 119. What kind of things have been resonating with you as you've been in that psalm? Is there anything you want to just go yay or whatever? What should we be loving about Psalm 119?

Hunter: I did love that I had a lot, I experienced a lot more solidarity with the psalmist than I initially anticipated when I came to the text. Obviously, we all think about Psalm 119. This person who's saying, your Word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path. The Lord is my portion, like sweeter than honey to my lips. I do love the Word like that, but it's not every day, and especially in seasons of grief, that I feel that way. So just to see him saying, I'm weary from grief strengthen me according to your Word. I'm like, okay, like this guy, he's experienced some hard stuff. He's saying he loves the Word but he's not just saying that in a time of plenty. So just a solidarity that I didn't expect to experience with someone who's able to say, like, how I love your instruction if I meditate all day long, but I can identify a little bit more with feeling down in the dust. It's really neat to get to see that solidarity. And one thing that I found particularly encouraging as a mother of young children is the 148th verse, which says, I am awake through each watch of the night to meditate on your promise. And just thinking about how often times as young mothers, especially with newborns, we can feel anxious about the night. And like I was referencing when we moved here, my son, he stopped sleeping and it was like he's in a new location. This is kind of the first move that he had experience that he could remember. And so he just he would come running down the stairs multiple times a night. And then for me, when a kid comes screaming down the stairs, I'm not going to be able to go back to sleep. My husband has that talent. I don't. I'm on an adrenaline rush for the rest of the night, but I think I was just encouraged to consider what it would look like to face sleepless nights with anticipation. And that's another thing. It's like just the scripture memory piece. To be able to kind of have this rolodex that I can go through in my mind when I'm laying there unable to sleep and then to just meditate on the promises of Word, like, that was particularly encouraging to me as someone who hasn't known as much sleep. Yeah, my rest in the Lord, even when I'm not sleeping. So that was one thing I'd love to hear from you guys, though. I mean, you guys are the ones who I can't wait to listen to the whole series.

Sarah: I think I've been really struck with that, though, in terms of just friends. We don't know his name, do we? But just the reality that the covenant promises are just such part of the wallpaper, they're just such the background. It just assumed that he doesn't even tell us us what they are because he just knows them and he draws on them and he draws hope from them. And I think that's just really striking that it's so ingrained in him to be trusting in

this covenant that he's been given and people have got to be given through the ages. He doesn't even describe it. It's just very much just assumed my salvation is in that. And I think, yeah, again, to be able to recall those promises, to be able to recall what we have in Christ when I don't have the word to hand and actually really am in that pressure situation, I really need it. That's just so precious, isn't it? And so necessary. I think so, yeah. That's encouraged my heart as I've been going through. How about you, 50?

Felicity: Yeah, I think one of the big things, I'm always amazed when I read those verses and he says things like so verse 120 says your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them. And this kind of the partnering between like I love your Word, I think what you're saying, I think what you're doing, God and all that is wonderful and therefore I will obey. He says that I was well in suffering, so he's like, I am suffering. This is hard. My comfort is the Word and so I will obey. And in my head, I don't think that has been put together so clearly before. And the more I thought about it, the more I thought, well, that does make sense because as I really truly believe that God's Word is the lifegiving promise, like this is God giving us Himself, then actually the sheer goodness of running in his ways of being obedient, that is the best place to be. And even when I'm suffering, even when I'm finding the pressures of life are hard because I think in the midst of suffering, often we can just kind of well, I go on sort of pause mode. I'm like, well, just wait for the storm to pass and then get back on it. And actually, I think the psalmist has challenged me that in the midst of the suffering, in the midst of everything, god's Word is brilliant and the best place to be is being obedient to that because that is all in with the Lord. And I don't know, I feel like I haven't quite kind of pulled that all the way through. But that's kind of where my head has been, my heart has been the last few days. Yeah. But I do think handrail what you're saying. That kind of the humility of the psalmist, which I think when you skim through the psalm and you kind of read through the Bible in a year kind of thing, I think you can kind of miss that he is kind of in the dust and weary and all these numerous requests to God to desperately help him. That's such an encouragement, isn't it? Because he's not perfect, thankfully. He's not a kind of impossible bar to meet.

Hunter: And yet his love for the Word like you were referencing compels Him. Yes, to obedience and also to sing. I mean, you look at 54, your statute said the theme of my song and with my book, one of the great challenges has been people thinking that I mean, literally singing it. And of course I do. Of course we've literally sing the words of God and we do whatever we can, whenever we can to help us remember God's words. But like the psalmist said, we get to testify to his wondrous works. I mean, we sing of what we love. That's what I am learning in Motherhood. It's like so often we want to try. And teach and instill these truth to our kids. But do we really love God's word? And I think that evangelism too, like what we love and what we delight in that's going to compel us to move forward to worship the Lord and to move forward towards others out of a love for Him. And so I do think it all starts with that, like a love for God and his word. And that's a really encouraging thing for me to remember because a lot of times I can get hung up later on down the road. I can get hung up on the obedience piece or I can get hung up on that testifying piece, like making sure I'm being obedient to the great Commission and evangelizing and all these things. But it's like, really, that is an encouragement to me as someone who's in a season of young motherhood, really busy feeling like pressured, like I want to sit with my Bible, but I just don't have time to sit down and feast on it as often as I'd like to. Just remember, man, let's just get back to the heart of the issue. Like, God, would you help me to love you and Your Word like the psalmist does? And starting there and a lot of these other things like the obedience factor, all the things that we want to see, the fruit of the Spirit, all these things, they start to organically kind of come out of us as we learn to love what God loves.

Felicity: I love that. I love that. And to echo with the psalmist that I delight in, the Lord God. There's so much heart, isn't there, in what he's saying?

Sarah: And so if he's so transparent with us today, just so thankful for your honesty both here in this conversation but also online, I just think it's such a shining light and it's just been such a joy. Would you pray for us and our listeners as we close up?

Hunter: Oh, I would absolutely love to.

Sarah: Thank you.

Hunter: Father, we come to you and thank you that every one of these words took on hands and feet that you saw fit to draw near to us to the person of Your Son Jesus. And we thank you for this wonderful book that helps us to reflect upon what you've done for us in Him. Father, we pray that you would give us hearts that love him and that love his words and that we would remember daily that this isn't about checking off another box on our spiritual todo list or earning brownie points. With you, but that we are approved by you and we have access to you because of the perfect performance of your son Jesus, and that would cause us great delight and that we would continue to reference your word and to learn more of what it looks like to delight in the life that you have offered us in Christ. We thank you for it. And we pray these things in his name. Amen. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thank you so much, Hunter. What a joy to be speaking together. We kind of known of each other online for a while, haven't we? A growing friendship. And it's a joy to be in conversation. Do pick up Hunter's book, read it, see it, say it, sing it at ten of those.com and give her a follow on Instagram. And do be sure to tune into the Journey Win podcast, which is gold dust the conversations that she's having. Is that it, Sarah?

Hunter: Anything else?

Sarah: That's it, yeah. We'll see you next time. Thanks again, Hunter.

Felicity: All right, goodbye.

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