

***WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH GOD'S WORD?***  
***PSALM 119:41-48***

In one of our early years of marriage, Raye Jeanne was trying to be creative with her cooking and trying to come up with some healthier options that tasted similar to some of our favorite meals. And so one night she put a casserole on the table and announced that it was lasagna — *zucchini* lasagna. Now I like lasagna and I like zucchini, but one should never try to mix the two together into one dish, cover it with fat-free cheese (another horrible invention) and attempt to call it “good.” Even Raye Jeanne admitted that it was pretty much a disaster.

So we nibbled at dinner, ate lots of salad or whatever else she had prepared with the pseudo-lasagna and then began to clean up the kitchen. The lasagna on our plates went into the trash and then I saw Raye Jeanne pull out the aluminum foil and start to cover the nearly full plate of our dinner mistake. “What are you doing?” I asked. “I’m covering the lasagna to put in the fridge for leftovers.” “We didn’t eat it tonight,” I observed (graciously, of course); “I’m sure not going to eat it tomorrow; do we have to keep it in the fridge until it grows green mold and *then* throw it out? Get rid of it now.”

That night we answered the ancient question, “What do you do with zucchini lasagna (with fat free cheese)?” You throw it out!

There are many questions like this, of course:

- ✓ What do you do with a degree in history? (or English, or Art...)
- ✓ What do you do with old license plates?
- ✓ What do you do with old tax files?
- ✓ What do you do with the “do not remove under penalty of law” tags on pillows and electrical cords?
- ✓ And every child’s favorite, what do you do when you are bored?

Now those aren’t really that complicated. But there is a common question many believers have, though they aren’t generally willing to voice it: we know we should read Scripture, but *honestly, what are we supposed to do with what we read?* Many times you can’t even remember what you’ve read when you finish, never mind come up with something to do with what you’ve read. So what do we do with God’s Word?

That’s a question that the psalmist answers for us in one of the stanzas of the longest chapter in the Bible — Psalm 119. In verses 41-48, he uses a series of “I will” statements to affirm his commitment to the Word of God, and with those affirmations reminds himself and us of Scripture’s value.

He is telling us what to do with God's Word.

You may remember that this psalm is not only long, but is also unique in that it is an extended acrostic. So its 176 verses are divided into 22 8-verse sections — one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And within each section, each line begins with that letter of the alphabet, as a means to help the hearers remember and memorize the psalm (that's why many of your Bibles have words you may not know between each of these sections — those are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet).

Additionally, in this Psalm the writer uses eight primary words to refer to Scripture, and this is one of only four stanzas in which each those words appears — one per verse — in the eight verses (the others are 57-64, 73-80, and 81-88).

Again, the psalmist is declaring in this section the usefulness of the Word of God. And as we begin a new year, and perhaps you are attempting again a regular Bible reading plan (and maybe you have already gotten bogged down), these are words we need to hear.

*WHAT DO YOU DO WITH GOD'S WORD?*

*YOU TAKE IT IN TO BE CHANGED BY IT.*

Here are seven declarations from the psalmist to the Lord affirming his commitment to the Word:

- 1. I Will ANSWER Accusations with the Word (vv. 41-42)**
- 2. I Will OBEY God's Commands Always (vv. 43-44)**
- 3. I Will LIVE in FREEDOM Through God's Principles (v. 45)**
- 4. I Will TESTIFY to God's Authority (v. 46)**
- 5. I Will DELIGHT in God's Commands (v. 47)**
- 6. I Will PRAY in Love for God's Commands (v. 48a)**
- 7. I Will MEDITATE on God's Inscriptions (v. 48b)**

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH GOD'S WORD?

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Here are seven declarations from the psalmist to the Lord affirming his commitment to the Word:

### 1. I Will Answer Accusations with the Word (vv. 41-42)

- It is tempting to read the Bible and think that the writers had lives of ease and simplicity. We think that they could command the things they did because they lived in the safety of a green house existence, separated from the harsh realities of life. But that is not the case. Consider the opening lines of this stanza —
  - ✓ The psalmist asks God to give His *lovingkindnesses* to him. Now God's lovingkindness is the Old Testament word for God's grace — it is a word that affirms the loyalty of God's love to His people, and it is often used in reference to God's covenant with Abraham and Israel.
  - ✓ But notice that the psalmist refers to the *lovingkindnesses* (pl.) of God. He is asking for God's grace to *come to* him on a daily basis. Like the Israelites gathering manna each morning while in the wilderness, he needs God's grace to sustain him. But those Israelites needed more than just food — they needed clothing and direction (“which way and how far today?”) and leadership protection from enemies (Egypt and Moab, etc.). They needed many provisions of grace. And so did the psalmist.
  - ✓ But there was one particular grace that he needed: *Your salvation*. What he really wants is deliverance. In the OT, *salvation* can refer to temporal salvation (“save me from my enemy”), or it can refer to salvation from God's wrath; and he apparently is talking about salvation from sin here, as the word *salvation* is clearly used in that way in Pss. 40:10; **51:14**.
  - ✓ And notice where salvation comes from — *according to Your Word* (“saying,” or “promise”). So the psalmist says, “I want and need your salvation from sin that you have promised.”
- And the reason the psalmist says he needs this salvation — so he will *have an answer for him who reproaches me* (taunts, annoys, or rejoices at his calamity). Let me make two observations:
  - ✓ Those who live biblically will experience taunts, criticism, and persecution. It was true of the psalmist and it is true today; if you desire to live obediently to God, you will be mocked and persecuted. Here is an example I came across just Friday morning: [www.bpnews.net/44000](http://www.bpnews.net/44000).
  - ✓ But there is an answer for those reproaches and persecution: it is in *trusting* and using the *Word* of God. *Word* refers to any form of statement, promise, or command of God's truth. It has the sense, “This is God talking...” and when God talks, the psalmist listens and trusts. He is secure in what God says and He is confident in the salvation that God promises.

- ✓ So friends and family criticize and persecute the follower of God — “you are a fool... (why do you give up ‘fun’ and give away money and go on mission trips and serve in slums?)” And the believer responds with an affirmation, “You may think me a fool, but I know peace with God and I have freedom from my sin and the wrath of God” (Jn. 14:27; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; **2 Sam. 23:5**).
- ✓ Since our salvation is true, we can say to every attack and sneer and fear, “what will separate me from the love of Christ?” (**Rom. 8:33-39**). Nothing! Because of this, we have an answer for all those who accuse (1 Pt. 3:15). When we know the lovingkindness of God, we have an answer for those who criticize and malign us.
- ✓ If you are not a Christian, this is not true for you. There is only one great question in life and it is not, “what is the meaning of life?” The question every man must answer is, “what will you do when you die and face God?”
  - The follower of God will answer, “I am trusting that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty of my sin and that His righteousness has been accounted to my life” (2 Cor. 5:21). And that is the only right answer — any other answer will leave one attempting to atone for his sins himself and he will spend eternity in Hell because he will never be able to pay for the debt of his sin himself.
  - If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, will you turn away from (repent of) your sin today and begin trusting and loving and following Jesus Christ?

There is a second response to God’s Word —

## 2. I Will OBEY God’s Commands Always (vv. 43-44)

- Having said that he will have an answer for those who are critical, he than asks, ***do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth***. In other words, “don’t deprive me of something to say about You and Your Word.” He doesn’t want to lose the ability to testify to God’s truthfulness.
- And to keep from losing that ability, the psalmist says, ***I wait for Your ordinances***.
  - ✓ He is patient in waiting for God’s ***ordinances*** — these are God’s judgments. And the word judgment doesn’t just refer to the ultimate wrath of God but also to His evaluations of all human situations and circumstances and His right to reveal what is right and good. The psalmist *wants* God’s evaluation of what is righteous and true.
  - ✓ And he wants the knowledge of what is righteous in God’s judgments and ***ordinances***, v. 45 says, ***so I will keep Your law continually***.
    - The word ***law*** is “Torah” and it can refer either to a single law/command given in the OT, or it can refer to the whole portion of what we know as the Mosaic Law (all the OT commands), or it can refer to all of the commands of Scripture given to guide God’s people.

And that is what is meant here — the psalmist pledges to keep and obey all God’s Word.

- And what he particularly emphasizes is not just that he is pledging to obey God’s law, but that he will do it **continually** — and specifically, **forever and ever**. He realistically evaluates his life and says, “I will always obey God’s Word — until the day I die and into eternity.”

- Did you see what the psalmist did? He starts verse 43 by saying, “I always want to have an ability to say something for You (to testify) — so I will do everything I can to always obey You.”
  - ✓ There is a connection between our obedience to God’s Word and our ability to testify of Him.
  - ✓ The reason that some unbelievers discount what believers say about Christ is that the believer’s lives have already discounted what they say about Christ. Our ability to offer a right testimony for Jesus Christ is dependent on our faithfulness to do what God and Christ say to do with our lives (cf. **1 Pt. 2:12**).
  - ✓ One writer has said, “...one of the first results of coming to know God as a God of love is obedience...” [Boice] Cf. **Jn. 14:15, 21, 23**.
  - ✓ Obedience often “feels” no easier for you than it does for a three-year-old. It’s hard. And there are not always immediate rewards with obedience.

*“Obedience to God’s will does not mean everything will go smoothly, that the wind will always be at our backs, and that the journey will be easy. Jesus told his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake, even though he knew the wind would be working against them. Despite the wind’s contrariness, they struggled on, because they knew they were doing his will.” [Shawn Craig, in CT, 2/8/99, p. 72.]*

- ✓ There are several reasons to obey Scripture: it honors the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9), it makes life “work” (Prov. 13:15; Gal. 6:7-10), because we now can (Eph. 4:20 — in contrast w. 17-19). But the reason the psalmist says we obey is so that we can have a testimony to the world. If we do not obey God, we lie about what we say of the unbeliever’s need for salvation.

### 3. I Will LIVE in FREEDOM Through God’s Principles (v. 45)

- Because he is committed to obeying, the psalmist also says, **I will walk at liberty**. The word “liberty” means to walk/live in an open expanse of space so that one is unencumbered by anything. (I think of a mountain clearing where it seems that you could walk and go forever...)
- And that liberty, the psalm says, is found by **seeking Your precepts**. There is *freedom* in God’s Word and in obeying God’s Word.

*"The way of the Lord, which to the ungodly is beset with thorns and briers, is the king's highway of liberty. The child of God walks here in the gladness of his heart and the rejoicing of his conscience."*

*[Bridges, 111.]*

- We talk about obedience and some fear that it will become legalistic and arbitrary. But when God says something is right and true and must be done, obedience is not legalism but it is a demonstration of a righteous and transformed life.
  - ✓ So one author said, "The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its Master."
  - ✓ Our inclination is to think that there is no freedom when we obey; God says there is no freedom without obedience, because if we do not obey, it is a demonstration that we are still ensnared by and in bondage to sin (Jn. 8:31-32; Rom 6:14ff, 20).
  - ✓ The other day Raye Jeanne walked into the room reading something and said, "Oh, I wish I could help this poor woman..." And she was talking about a woman that she read about who was engaging in some perversity — someone who thought she had liberty and was really in chains. There is no freedom in sin. Only bondage. And as we read the Word of God and obey it, we will not find obedience to be a sorrowful heartache, but it will be a liberating joy.
  - ✓ Read God's Word and be committed to real liberty and freedom; the liberty of enslavement to God.

*"Let but our eyes be opened, our judgments clearly exercised, our consciences suffered to speak; and this point is clear — Sin is slavery (John, viii. 34)— Holiness is liberty. The sinner may live in bonds with as much delight as if he was in his element. He may seem even to himself to be at large, while in fact he is 'shut up, and cannot come forth.' For such is the tyranny under which he is bound, that he cannot help himself; and (to use the confession of a heathen) while 'he sees and approves better things, he follows the worse.' Every sin is a fresh chain of bondage (Tit. iii. 3), under the check of a cruel master. On the other hand—the Lord's commands—as he himself declares, and all his servants testify—are 'for our good alway.' (Deut. vi. 24. Matt. xi. 29, 30. Comp. 1 John, v. 3.) His 'service is perfect freedom.' (Liturgy.) The life of liberty is to be under the bonds of holy love and duty. (Luke, i. 74, 75. Comp. Ps.*

*cxvi. 16.) Let the trial be made of two Masters; conviction must follow.*

*"True it is, that the corrupt and rebellious inclinations will 'lust' (Gal. v. 17) to the end. But as long as indulgence is denied, conflict excited, and the constant endeavour maintained to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 5), our liberty is established, even where it is not always enjoyed. Every fresh chain, by which we bind ourselves to the Lord, makes us more free."*

*[Bridges, 112-13.]*

#### 4. I Will TESTIFY to God's Authority (v. 46)

- In our obedience, there is another declaration to make about God's Word — ***I will speak of Your testimonies before kings...***
- This seems to be a hypothetical situation. We don't know the author of this psalm or his circumstances, but it seems clear that he is under some distress and even persecution (v. 42); and now he anticipates a time when he might be taken before a civil authority.
  - ✓ Perhaps he is in court on some false charge against him (like Nehemiah or Paul). Perhaps he is there because his commitment to the Scriptures have demanded disobedience to the government (like Daniel and his friends).
  - ✓ Whatever the circumstance, he can envision a time when he will have to stand and make a declaration of his faith in God. And he says unequivocally, "I will tell of the truths that reveal who You are and I will do it without any shame. I will boldly stand for You."
  - ✓ He is preparing to suffer for doing what is right and is preparing his mind and heart for that day.
  - ✓ Being unashamed of God and His Word is one of the characteristics of the believer. Cf. Rom. 1:15-16; 2 Tim. 1:7-8; Acts 4:18-20; 5:41; 6:12-15; **Dan. 3:16-18**.
- It can be intimidating to give a testimony for God in the court of a "king," but we do well to remember that there is another King before whom all men will have to stand, and Jesus says of that day, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (Mt. 10:28).
- Have you noticed that the psalmist refers to talking about God three times in this stanza (vv. 42, 43a, 46)? There is an expectation that if we know about God and His Word we will talk about Him.

#### 5. I Will DELIGHT in God's Commands (v. 47)

- All these things might not sound like something we might like to do — but the psalmist says, ***I will delight in Your commands***. Hearing and doing God's Word will be a joy to him because he loves God's Word. The fact that God's Word can be called a command means that God is authoritative in His Word — He speaks and it is so.
- The year before Raye Jeanne and I got married I had two roommates who were less than meticulous house cleaners (not that I was particularly clean). I got back to our apartment after Christmas several days before they did and I cleaned it (all the dishes in the cabinets and 27 razors on the bathroom counter, etc...). And then I posted "house rules" for everyone to follow. When they got back one of them saw the rules and said, "*Who posted this?!*" "I did," I responded. "Ok... — I just

wanted to know.” He wanted to know who was the authority and on what basis he was in authority.

- ✓ God is our authority. And He tells us what to do because He is King and sovereign.
- ✓ And that might lead us, like my former roommate, to begrudgingly comply. But not the psalmist. He *loves* God’s authority and commands.
- ✓ Here is an anomaly for the natural man — the man who has not been saved by God does not love to be told what to do; but the man who has been saved by God loves the commands of God because he knows they are God’s provision for him, to care for him.
- ✓ Why does the psalmist love God’s authority in His Word? Why does a man love his wife? I remember the first time I told Raye Jeanne I loved her; I had no good definition of love in mind and frankly I think that mostly I meant, “when I look at you my heart rate doubles and my stomach turns inside out.” And then I said the same words on the day we got married and there was a *gravitas* to them, knowing that I was making a big and long commitment, but not really understanding what it would mean. And now I still tell her daily that I love her and after 27-1/2 years there is a depth to the words that affirm, “I’m here; I will work and live for your benefit and God’s glory in our marriage.” The love has been tested over 27 years and found true.
- ✓ Why does the psalmist love God’s authority in His Word? Because he has lived that Word and found it to be faithful and true and good for him. So Spurgeon says, “The Word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it.”
- ✓ This is the first time the psalmist uses this word to refer to his love of Scripture, thought it would not be the last: cf. also Ps. 119:97, 113, 119, 127, 132, 159, 163, 165, 167. Christ asks Peter whether Peter loves Him (Jn. 21). It is also fitting to ask whether we love His Word.
- ✓ It could be said that since the Word is living and it is the revelation of the Godhead, there is no love for God without love for His Word. Since God loves His Word, then we also must love His Word. To love the Scriptures is not “bibliolatry.” To love the Bible is to love God.
- ✓ Do you want to say with the psalmist that you love the Word? Then live it. And you will find that it is lovely.

- There is a sixth declaration of the psalmist for his commitment to the Word

## 6. I Will PRAY, in Love for God’s Commands (v. 48a)

- Verse 48 almost feels like a NT doxology — the psalmist is so excited about the Scriptures that he bursts out this declaration, *I will lift up my hands to your commandments...*
  - ✓ The lifting of his hands was a figure of speech for prayer — in other words, as he contemplates the Scriptures he says, “I will pray in worship of what I read in the Word.”
  - ✓ He has taken in the Word and been changed by the Word; his love for sin has been changed into



a love for God and His Word, so the psalmist says he will pray.

- People often ask about spiritual disciplines and most books will list at least 8-10, if not more (Bible reading, Bible memory, prayer, confession, worship, evangelism, service, fasting, silence & solitude, journaling, and suffering). There is a biblical basis for most of those, but there are two that dominate: Bible and prayer.
  - ✓ The two are linked like the two wings of a plane. Ask any of our pilots which wing they like best — the left or the right? I'm sure they'll say, "both." You have no flight without both wings (at least not for long). And there is no thriving spiritual life without Bible and prayer.
  - ✓ So the psalmist nears the end of this stanza and affirms that the Bible has led him to joyful prayer. And as in the previous verse, the reason he prays is his love for the Word. Love for the Word will lead one to worship the author of that Word.
  - ✓ So if you want a quick test of your spiritual health, ask two questions:
    - What is my Bible intake like? How regular is my time in the Scriptures? And how much is that time in the Word changing my life?
    - What is my prayer life like? Am I regularly praying with focused, intentional prayer (not just two tweets a day to God)? Does my life reflect that I am dependent on God in prayer? (More on this topic next week.)
- The psalmist makes one final declaration of his commitment to God's Word:

## 7. I Will MEDITATE on God's Inscriptions (v. 48b)

- Because he wants to know God's Word, the psalmist says he *will meditate on Your statutes*.
  - ✓ To *meditate* means to give thoughtful contemplation. Have you ever read your Bible, closed it, and then not remembered even what passage you read, never mind what was in it? That means there was no meditation that day. You read, but you didn't think about it. To meditate means to ponder and reflect on what was written and the implications of it. Contrary to Eastern meditation which empties the mind of everything, biblical mediation means filling our minds with Scripture — we want to be Bible saturated.
  - ✓ And what the psalmist says he is pondering is God's *statutes* — these statutes have been engraved or inscribed; they are permanent and stable. These are unchanging truths. (And that's why it's worth meditating on them — they won't change...)
  - ✓ And again, the reason he meditates on them is because he loves them — notice the *and* between "which I love" and "I will meditate." The two are connected: because he loves, he meditates.

- To help you meditate, let me give you a few suggestions:
  - ✓ For every two minutes you spend reading, spend one minute meditating. [Whitney]
  - ✓ “Meditate with a pen and paper:”
    - What is the main idea/central truth?
    - What does this passage reveal about God?
  - ✓ Remember: What is one key verse that you can think about today?
  - ✓ Pray the passage.
  - ✓ Commit to do (at least) one thing that day that will reinforce what you learned.

**CONCLUSION:** There you have the psalmist’s commitment. Because the Bible is the God’s authoritative Word for all of life, he makes these declarations:

- ✓ I Will ANSWER Accusations with the Word (vv. 41-42)
- ✓ I Will OBEY God’s Commands Always (vv. 43-44)
- ✓ I Will LIVE in FREEDOM Through God’s Principles (v. 45)
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- ✓ I Will PRAY in Love for God’s Commands (v. 48a)
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This is what you do with God’s Word.

The Word of God is useful to answer those who oppose us, to lead us to obey God, and to stimulate our delight in and love for Him. Let’s use the Word this year in the way it was intended.