

**YOU AND THE WORD**  
**PSALM 119**

When I was a child, at Christmas my maternal grandparents always had a candy gift bag for each of the grandchildren. But there was a requirement for receiving that gift: you had to quote a Bible verse from memory. We shared Christmas with them in my sixth grade year and I don't remember what I quoted to get my bag, but I remember what I was tempted to quote: Jn. 11:35 — "Jesus wept." I don't think that would have been considered acceptable.

But I wasn't the first person to attempt to use the Bible in that kind of inappropriate way. In his classic work *The Treasury of David*, Charles Spurgeon tells the story of one George Wishart, a Bishop of Edinburgh in the seventeenth century. Wishart was the biographer of the Marquis of Montrose and he had been sentenced to die by hanging like his benefactor. However, at the time, a condemned prisoner was allowed to choose a song to sing right before he was to be hung. Guess what psalm he chose? It wasn't Ps. 117 which has two verses and five lines. Nope. He chose Psalm 119. And it was good he did, because 2/3 of the verses were sung when a pardon arrived to spare his life. I guess you might say he was saved by a long song.

While it was good news for Wishart (side note: Spurgeon notes that he was more well known for his shrewdness than his sanctity), that's not what God intended with this song. This psalm, like all Scripture, reveals the character of God. And it reveals the character of God's revelation, the Bible. For about 15 years, we have been slowly making our way through this psalm, examining 1-2 stanzas each year. Last week we finished the final stanza; this morning we want to take one final look at this psalm in its totality. As a stimulant to feed ourselves on this Word this year, what can we learn from this great psalm?

**THE BIBLE IS GOD'S ALL-SUFFICIENT REVELATION TO RIGHTLY GUIDE THE CHILD OF GOD IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE.**

That statement has several important emphases:

- ✓ The Bible is from God; it is His revelation and it has His authority. It tell us about Him and tells us what He calls us to do in order to follow Him (and it compels us to obey Him).
- ✓ The Bible is sufficient for all people and all situations. There never has been and never will be a scenario in your life when the Bible won't have an answer for you. (The answer may not be easy to believe or do and there may be times when it feels harsh, but every answer is exactly what we need and comes from God's goodness: "You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes" (v. 68).
- ✓ The Bible is supremely for the child of God. The Bible reveals the way of salvation for the unbeliever, but ultimately, the unbeliever cannot obey and do what God says (and he doesn't want to obey; 1 Cor. 2:14ff). This book is the guide for God's followers.

As we summarize this prized word about God's Word, the psalmist **answers three primary questions** about the Word of God:

## 1. What is the Word of God?

- Structure of the psalm —
  - ✓ There are many significant passages on the Word of God in addition to this one: Pss. 1, 19; Josh. 1:8; Jn. 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pt. 1:24-25; 2 Pt. 1:3, 19-21. But this one stands above all other passages because of its length and comprehensiveness.
  - ✓ It is written as an acrostic.
    - There are 22 stanzas — one for each letter in the Hebrew alphabet; the first stanza begins with the first letter of the alphabet (*aleph*) and the last stanza concludes with the last letter in the alphabet (*taw*). Each line in each stanza begins with the letter of that stanza.
    - It was written as an acrostic to help with memory (since the scroll was kept in synagogue).
    - As an alphabetic acrostic it also suggested the thoroughness of the discussion of the Word — “the Bible is explained from A to Z.” It conveys perfection and completion.
  - ✓ There are eight lines in each stanza, evidently one line for each of the main words used for the Bible.
- The primary words used for Scripture in the psalm —
  - ✓ **God's Word is the law (Torah)** — used 25x (more than other words); “law” often refers to the first five books of the OT and even more specifically to the Law of God given to Moses on Sinai. But it is also used more generally. The word means, “pointing out, directing, teaching, instructing.” So the law of God is the revelation of God, pointing out God's will to mankind. It is “Yahweh's communication of moral truth and demonstration of his grace and guidance.” [Allen, in Zemek] (Cf. vv. 1, 29, 34).
  - ✓ **God's Word is His testimony** — this is a court term, a “witness.” “The law of God is His testimony, because it is His own affirmation concerning His nature, attributes, and...demands.” [in Zemek] The word emphasizes the authority of God and man's accountability to Him (vv. 2, 59, 88).
  - ✓ **God's Word is His precept** — this is a military term that indicates a superior provides rules and *expectations* for how his men will operate in a given situation. It is the “details” of God's Word that direct us in particular ways (vv. 4, 100, 104).
  - ✓ **God's Word is His statute** — this is something that is prescribed; it came from a word that referred to something engraved or inscribed — so it implies permanence (which is why God wrote His Law on stone and not the back of an envelope or a phone app; the medium itself denoted permanence). This means what God has said is *binding* (authoritative). The psalmist most often speaks about wanting to learn/be taught the statutes of God (vv. 33, 64, 68, 71).
  - ✓ **God's Word is His commandment** — Scripture reasons with men and attempts to persuade them of the truth. But this word refers to God's right to give orders; Scripture is not just persuasive, but commanding — in the Bible God has revealed His insistent will (vv. 10, 21). These commands are also a delight to the psalmist (vv. 35, 47-48, 60).

- ✓ **God's Word is His judgment** — the word often translated **ordinances** refers to “judgments” — the standards of God by which He will evaluate man's condition. It is God's final standard. It is how God righteously rules and governs His kingdom (vv. 106, 108, 137, 160)
- ✓ **God's Word is His word** — this is a very general word — it is God's declaration in any form — a promise, statement, or command. It is also the totality of His revealed will (vv. 9, 25, 89, 105).
- ✓ **God's Word is His promise** — this is from the word “to say” and also is often translated “word,” but refers to the particular promises of God and the comfort derived from them (vv. 41, 58, 103, 116).
- ✓ While these words are distinct, they do overlap. Like eight ringing bells that sound different notes but are tuned to one piano, they sound similar and harmonize together. So we see distinctions in the words, but we also are left to meditate on the totality of the message about the Bible...
- A summary of the nature of the Word of God —
  - ✓ The Bible tells us what it is.
  - ✓ The Bible tells us what it does.
  - ✓ The Bible tells us what we are to do.
  - ✓ It is authoritative. It is from God and about God and has the authority to say, “Thus says the Lord” and that always compels us to obey and follow (and there is wisdom and joy in that obedience).
  - ✓ The Bible is wholly true in what it says (it is always right and never wrong); it is wholly good in what it says (it always leads in beneficial ways); it is wholly sufficient in what it says (it needs no help to guide us or to reveal God and His truth).
  - ✓ GBC doctrinal statement says the Bible is “the final authority for faith and life.”
  - ✓ It is because of that priority that Luther said, “For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”

## **2. What Does the Word of God Do?**

- **The kinds of circumstances in which the Word of God speaks —**
  - ✓ There is question about the identity of the author of this psalm.
    - Some speculate that it is David because it sounds like David; others speculate that it is someone like Daniel who wrote at the end of (or after) the exile in Babylon. We just don't know.
    - The uncertainty of the author speaks to the universality of this Word — whether you are a king like David, or an exile in a foreign country (like Daniel and us); whether you are old or young, the Bible is a sufficient source of wisdom and hope for you.
  - ✓ The difficulty in classifying the psalm
    - It has elements of a hymn of praise (the joy of the psalmist; vv. 70, 111, 162, 164, 171)
    - It has elements of prayer (vv. 169-176)

- It has didactic/teaching elements (vv. 12, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135)
  - It has elements of lament for persecution and suffering (vv. 22-23, 28, 75, 92, 107, 153)
  - The diversity of tones helps us see the universal usefulness of the Word of God. It is adequate for every situation of life. Whatever we need, it speaks to and addresses us.
- **The attributes of the Word of God depicted in the psalm** (cf. chart on blog); this morning let's highlight the most prominent attributes of what the Word is and does:
    - ✓ **It is from and about the Lord**
      - Notice **verse 1** — **who walk in the law of the LORD**. God's covenant name YHWH appears 24x in this psalm (in virtually every stanza); that title reveals the source of the Word:
 

... It is from the only One who is capable of making a covenant with Israel (Gen. 15:12ff).

... It is from the One who loves Israel enough to give them what is best for them.
      - But notice also all the pronouns that refer to God (**vv. 2-8** — **Him/His; You/Your**). There are only five verses that do not refer directly to God in this psalm. It is by Him, about Him, for Him (and His glory). And it comes with His authority (which demands our attention to it). This is no ordinary book — it is alive, active, and transformative. You cannot know God without this book.
      - "Of Him, as of no one else, it is true that what He says *goes*. It is in truth the word of God that rules the world, and that fixes our fortunes for us." [Packer, *Knowing God*.]
      - "Every statement by the psalmist...ultimately breathes in an atmosphere of dependency....[He has an] overriding theocentric orientation....[so] it is unequivocally God's Word which preoccupies the psalmist." [Zemek] Because this book is about God...
    - ✓ **It is righteous** (**vv. 123, 128, 137**; at least 12 vv., plus at least 11 vv. on Scripture's truth/faithfulness)
      - He is righteous by nature; He (only) does what is right; and He (only) speaks what is right. "God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right." [Grudem]
      - Nothing God does is wrong. Even when we are afflicted with suffering, He is right (**v. 75**).
      - This is hopeful and encouraging for us, because in righteousness He must condemn sin and sinners, and He must rectify (make right) all things. And He will.
      - When you read the Word of God you will never be led astray either accidentally or intentionally.
    - ✓ **It is the way to live** (at least 13 vv.)
      - There appear to be many different ways to live, but there are only two: we are either living on and following the pathway of God or we are following the pathway of self, the world, and Satan.
      - The Bible exposes the pathway of God, and it is always safe and good (**vv. 1, 35, 45, 105**).
      - 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 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.” [Charles Bridges.]

✓ **It teaches** (at least 24x; cf. vv. 7, 12, 33, 68, 73)

- I’m not sure how to say this discreetly and inoffensively, but, it must teach us because we (all of us) are so ignorant. We just don’t know. (And sometimes we are willfully ignorant.)
- So the Word of God is given to us to teach us about God and His world and what is best for us.
- Only the Word of God is sufficiently capable to make sense of how to live in this world.
- For instance, only the word of God will make sense of our suffering and difficulties —
  - ... it will keep us from sin (101)
  - ... it will revive us (107)
  - ... it will give us delight (92)
  - ... it will teach and transform us (71) — and it will do that in our trials.
- When you learn from this Book, though you may not have a degree, you will be wiser than every educated unbeliever in the world (vv. 98-99).
- There is no situation where the Bible can’t teach you what you need (vv. 96, 128)
  - ... When the psalmist says, ***I have seen a limit to all perfection*** (96), he means, “I have looked at everything that claims completeness and perfection, and it’s all limited.” Everything that is proposed as perfect by mankind is ultimately defective. It all needs to be fixed.
  - ... There is an emptiness to the claims of the world. The world’s claims are unsatisfying to us and they are condemnable by God. They won’t survive or give hope or life.
  - ... But God’s commands? They are ***exceedingly broad***. God’s Word is extensive and powerful. God’s Word is broad enough to cover every situation. This phrase is actually understated — there is a limit to man’s perfections, but there is no limit to the breadth of God’s Word. It’s not just “exceedingly” broad — it is infinitely broad. It is enough for every circumstance.
  - ... What is your need today? Did you identify it? The Bible has an answer for you. It may not be easy, but it is the answer you need and it will be good for you.

✓ **It is joy**

- The psalmist says he finds delight in the Word, he has joy in it, he rejoices, and he sings the Word.
- Like the other Scripture writers, he has lots of happy language about this book.
- When you think “happy,” it’s ok to think “giddy” (vv. 169, 174), but even more, think “settled, content, at peace, restful, satisfied.” E.g., in the moment of fighting against the sin of anger you may not be giddy, but 10 minutes later, after the hostile words are withheld, you are content.
- The psalmist thinks of the Word of God and he sees it as the source of joy. And because it will give him joy, he wants nothing else (vv. 24, 72, 92, 103, 174).
  - ... (v. 72) No amount of any earthly treasure can compare to any of God’s word that has been declared by God’s mouth and revealed to man.

... So one commentator says, "The word proceeding from the mouth of God is now more precious to him than the greatest earthly riches." [Delitzsch, 252.]

... "His pain gave him far more in the Scripture than it cost him in affliction." [Lawson]

... (v. 103) — The psalmist has ventured into life, applied the Scriptures to his life and conformed his actions to God's Word, and as he has meditated on the results, found sweetness, joy, and satisfaction.

... There is no bitterness from his obedience to God. His obedience has not left him with the bitterness of regret. He is not sorrowful for his obedience.

... Q: When you get up in the morning and you pick up your coffee and Bible, does it fill you with joy and anticipation? Is there expectancy? Anticipation? Delight?

... Again, don't think of the happiness of going to Disney Land — something that happens with rarity and is an unusual joy; think of it as reunion with a best friend; dinner with your spouse at the end of the day; conversation with your child on the way to school...

➤ The Bible is a joy because the truths in it lead us to God and to a life that looks like Him and are filled with the blessings that flow from obedient submission to Him.

- We need the Bible because there is no book like this book. There is no book that can compel and do what this book does. It is alive and it brings to life (Heb. 4:12)...

### 3. How Do We Respond to the Word of God?

- Having received this Word from God, what shall we do with it? Like the attributes of this book, there are a great many responses (I counted at least 45); let's highlight the prominent ones:

- Obey the Word of God

- ✓ Of all the responses to the Word of God, the most dominant one is the one to keep, obey, and follow the Word of God (at least 29x).
- ✓ The psalmist just doesn't want to disobey and be in rebellion against God —
  - Obedience is the goal of his life (v. 17).
  - Obedience is the desire of his heart (v. 34).
  - Obedience is his promise to the Lord (v. 57).
  - Obedience is his immediate and full response to God's revelation (vv. 59-60)
- ✓ In fact, he establishes this desire in the very first stanza (vv. 4, 5, 8).
- ✓ It has been said that too often we are busy managing our sin than repenting of our sin. We manage our sin and don't repent because we don't have a desire or commitment to obey (vv. 59-60).
- ✓ Do you have a desire to obey? Do you have a desire not to disobey? Do you want your life to look like God (and Christ)? That's what we need: Dale Johnson (ACBC) has written, "The sufficient Word of God revives the soul, enlightens the eyes, makes the simple wise, and rejoices the heart (Psalm 119:7-10). These are not the meals our flesh craves, but it is the nourishment we need."

## • Remember the Word of God

- ✓ About 10x the psalmist says he will remember or not forget the Word of God.
- ✓ He is purposefully being attentive to remember what God says.
  - He goes back to the *eternal (of old) truths* he has been taught (v. 52)
  - He remembers the Word in the dark times at night (v. 55)
  - He remembers God when he is attacked by persecutors and suffering (vv. 61, 83, 141)
  - In every circumstance he is purposeful to remember the Word of God.
  - This remembrance is the result of meditating on God's Word (15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148)
- ✓ This is not just the "what are you memorizing or meditating" portion of the sermon.
- ✓ It is the reminder to be purposeful with the Word.
  - At night I usually read for 15-30 minutes as I'm falling asleep. I rarely read anything important; that will just get me excited and make it hard to fall asleep. I read novels, non-fiction, or sports. And often the next night I have to spend a few minutes looking backward, "what did I read?"
  - That's not the way to read the Bible. The Bible is to be read with attention and interest. It should be read so that you aren't just encouraged and helped in the moment, but that you are also helped as you pray and as you drive to work, meet with a client, and then pay bills at night.
  - Can I just give you a tool I have found very helpful as I read? Before you close the Bible, ask:
    - ... What did I learn about God?
    - ... What did I learn about God's world?
    - ... What did I learn about me?
    - ... What do I need to do/change?
    - ... Don't leave the book until you have addressed those questions (and maybe written your answers). Those questions will help you meditate (think about/fill your mind with) the Bible and filling your mind with the Bible will help you remember it through the day/week.

## • Love the Word of God

- ✓ We've already said that the Bible is joy. This is the related response. Because it is joyful, love it.
- ✓ Like a young married man, the psalmist just can't seem to contain his passion for the Word.
  - He loves the commands of God (vv. 47-48)
  - He loves the law of God as it directs him in what to do (v. 97)
  - He learns to hate the evil deeds of evil men (loving God will teach you to hate sin, vv. 113, 163)
  - He loves God's revelation more than anything the world can offer (v. 127)
  - He loves the purity and sanctity (sanctification) of the Word (v. 140)
  - He enjoys peace and contentment because he loves God's directive law (v. 165)
  - He loves God's word from his heart (v. 167)
- ✓ So obey the Word of God and think on the Word — but do that because you have prepared your heart to love the Word of God. You have chosen to give it your singular focus and attention.

**CONCLUSION:** Like Jesus' questions of Peter, "Do you *love* God's Word?" "Do you love it more than the world?" Do you? *Then feed yourself on that Word.*

In this world and in this year, we will have trouble. Sometimes the trouble comes from the world and our circumstances. Sometimes it comes from our own hearts and our own inclination to sin. Either way, we have what we need in the Word of God. This year, *what is your plan to take in the Word of God* and be nurtured by that Word? If you don't have a plan, then make a plan to read, listen to, meditate on, and practice the Word of God that has been given to you as a gift of God's kindness.

**NEW MEMBER VIDEO:**

**BENEDICTION PRAYER:** Psalm 119:9-12 and prayer for new member