

"Getting the Most Out of the Bible"

Psalm 119 (Part 2)

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Introduction:

Some time ago, I remember reading a story about a minister who was flying to the west coast who struck up a conversation with the passenger beside him. The minister asked the man in the seat beside him, **"What is your occupation?"** The man replied, **"I am an astronomer—what about you?"** And the minister said, **"I am a minister."** The astronomer looked a little bit uneasy and shifted around in his seat a little bit, and then he said, **"I used to attend church when I was young, but my wife and I do not go very often anymore. But the way we look at it, the Bible is pretty simple. It all boils down to, 'Get along with your neighbor and stay out of trouble.'"** At that point the minister said, **"That's interesting. I feel the same way about what you do, because as I see it, astronomy all boils down to 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.'"**

I think the minister illustrated a very deep truth there, because the Bible is, in fact, very simple, and yet (like astronomy), the Bible can also be very complex, and it certainly deserves a great deal of study. And yet as we look at the world around us, we discover that the Bible is not appreciated. For example, one recent survey has discovered that only 16% of Americans read their Bibles every day. To me, that was a little surprising, because actually I thought that the figure would be much lower. And yet even 16% is a rather small percentage for a nation that generally describes itself as being basically a "Christian" nation. Another survey found that 43% of all Americans either rarely or never read their Bibles. And to me, that sounds pretty accurate—43% have absolutely no regard for the word of God whatsoever. And yet even more troubling than that, surveys have also discovered that the average minister spends less than 20 minutes a day in Bible reading and prayer combined! Not only that, but less than 30% of religious leaders read their Bibles every day. And so it is a problem that starts with those who claim to be leaders.

If you were with us last week, then you might remember that we considered **Psalm 119**, and we looked together at the benefits of studying the word of God. **»PPT»** We discovered that **Psalm 119** is the longest chapter in the longest book of the Bible. The Psalm has 176 verses, evenly divided into 22 sections of 8 verses each, one section for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And as we considered **Psalm 119**, we looked at the benefits of studying God's word:

- We discovered that the word of God provides **JOY**—»PPT» according to verses 1-2, "*How happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. How happy are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.*"
- We discovered that the word of God brings us **FREEDOM**—»PPT» (in verses 44-45), "*So I will keep Your law continually, forever and ever. And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.*"
- The word of God provides **comfort** in times of suffering and persecution—»PPT» (in verse 165), "*Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble.*"
- The word of God provides **WISDOM**—»PPT» (in verse 104), "*From Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.*"
- And finally, the word of God provides **LIGHT** on the dark path of life—»PPT» (in verse 105), "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*"

And as we closed last week, we considered an acrostic based on the word **BIBLE**—**Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth**. This morning, I would like for us to shift our thinking a little bit, and as we continue to keep our thoughts focused on Psalms 119, I would like for us to consider another acrostic based on the word **BIBLE**—**Basic Instructions Before Life Everyday** (REPEAT).

If you were with us last week, you might remember the homework assignment—we were take a few minutes during the week to underline every reference to the word of God in Psalms 119. I did it again in another copy of the Bible, and out of 176 verses, I think I could only find 3 or 4 without a reference to the word of God! If you discovered something similar or even a little different, I would love to hear from you after the service later today.

But this morning we are going to move from the benefits of studying the word of God (**Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth**) to more of a practical lesson on how we can get more out of the word of God (**Basic Instructions Before Life Everyday**). »PPT» How can we appreciate it better? How can we understand it in a deeper way? How can we get more out of it?

I don't know about all of you, but I can get pretty frustrated when I do not understand something. This past week, someone came over to our house so we could help them figure out how to load some music on a tiny little I-Pod. And you know, it is interesting how much frustration can be caused by a little device not much bigger than a stick of gum! Absolutely amazing! And I have a feeling that I am not the only one who gets a little frustrated when I cannot understand something. Well, the same thing is also true of the word of God! And so as we challenge ourselves to spend more time reading the word of God, I would like for us to consider some basic principles outlined in Psalms 119 concerning how we can get more out of the word of God as we study.

I. And one of the first principles we need to consider before really getting the most out of the Bible is that we need to ACCEPT IT AS THE WORD OF GOD. »PPT»

If we think back to those words that we underlined, we remember words like: law, statutes, truth, way, word, precepts, commandments, ordinances, testimonies, and so on. King David, therefore, looked at the Bible as the inspired word of God. This is not a normal book. If we look at the Bible as being normal, if we look at the Bible as just another old book that is hopelessly out-of-date, if we look at the Bible as obsolete and irrelevant to any issues we might face today, if we look at the Bible as a man-made document only reflecting the culture of its time, if we look at the Bible as being full of contradictions and mistakes, then we will hardly get anything out of it.

And so one of the first steps in getting the most out of the Bible is to look at it with the same attitude that King David had. King David understood that the Bible came from God—that every word is inspired—that every word came from the mouth of God. In **verse 13**, David said, ***"With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Your mouth."*** David understood that Scripture comes from the mouth of God.

We remember what Jesus said in His confrontation with Satan in **Matthew 4:4**, ***"It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"*** The thought continues in **Psalms 119:160**, ***"The sum of Your word is truth [S-U-M, not S-O-M-E], and every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting."*** David understood that all of God's word is truth—that the Bible comes from God. As Jesus said in His prayer for His disciples on the night before He died (in **John 17:17**, ***"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*** Like David, Jesus also understood that word of God is truth. The word of God is an objective standard. The word of God is our compass. The word of God is like a tape measure or a yardstick. It is a standard that does not change with culture, tradition, or emotion. The word of God always stays the same.

We remember Paul's prayer of thanksgiving concerning the church in Thessalonica in **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, ***"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."*** So first of all, then, if we are to really get anything out of the Bible, if we are to appreciate it, if we are to truly understand it, then we need to start by making sure we accept it as the word of God.

II. As we look back to Psalms 119, we also find that we are not only to accept the Bible as the word of God, but we are also to MEDITATE ON THE BIBLE. »PPT»

In **verse 15**, King David says, ***"I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways."*** In **verse 23**, he says, ***"Even though princes sit and talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes."*** In **verse 27**, David says, ***"Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your***

wonders." In **verse 48**, he says, **"And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Your statutes."** In **verse 78**, he says, **"May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; but I shall meditate on Your precepts."** In **verse 97** he says, **"O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day."** In **verse 99**, he says, **"I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation."** And then in **verse 148**, he goes on to say, **"My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word."** In other words, David was looking forward to getting the night shift so he could stay up and study and meditate upon the word of God.

But what does it mean to **"meditate"**? We hear that word, and often we think of some kind of eastern religion—Buddhism, or perhaps Hinduism. Perhaps we think of yoga. Perhaps we think of clearing the mind to reach a **"higher state of consciousness."** Perhaps we think of an idol or perhaps we think of a man sitting there with his legs crossed in the lotus position. But when we look into it, and when we look at the word as it is used here in **Psalm 119**, the word literally refers to murmuring, to saying something under our breath, to repeating something over and over. The word refers to talking to ourselves. It refers to focused thinking. Someone has said that if we know how to worry then we know how to meditate! Worry is simply focused thinking on a problem. Worry is allowing our minds to dwell on something negative. But instead of focused thinking on a problem, we can focus our thinking on the word of God, and then we call it meditation!

How can we meditate on the word of God? Perhaps we can bring a Bible with us wherever we go. Years ago, I remember a counselor at Bible camp who challenged his Bible class students to try to catch him without the word of God. He brought it everywhere—on hikes, to breakfast, in the ball-field—everywhere. Finally, one morning some campers came up outside the shower stall and demanded to see the Bible. He reached over the curtain and showed them a little New Testament in a Zip-Loc bag! We can literally take it everywhere! I know that a lot of cell phones have the ability to store the Bible, and to do word searches, and to simply read from verse to verse. We can purchase the Bible on CD to listen to in the car. We can download an audio Bible in mp3 format to listen to on some kind of a player—perhaps on an i-Pod, as I referred to earlier. We can write out a verse on a card and bring that card with us throughout the day. As I have seen in some of the homes of our members, we can put a verse on the bathroom mirror, so that we see it every morning, and then we can think about that verse throughout the day. We can use a computer program and print up a chapter to bring with us during the day. We can choose a small paragraph and read it over and over until it is very familiar, we can ponder its meaning, we can look very carefully at each word and phrase, we can chew on it in our minds, we can soak it up, we can memorize it, we can we think it over and over, and we can allow that passage to change us from the inside.

However we choose to do it, we can certainly follow the example of King David as he looked forward to meditating in the word of God throughout the day.

III. As we look back to Psalm 119, we also find that we are to PRAY ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at verse 12 as David makes a request of God. In verse 12, David says, ***"Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes."*** And then he continues the prayer in verses 17-19.

David prays to God in verses 17-19, and he says, ***"Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law. I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me."*** The prayer continues in verse 73, as he says, ***"Your hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments."*** David, therefore, was asking God for understanding, he was praying that his eyes would be open and that he might be able to find and understand the word of God.

And it appears that the prayer is answered in verse 102, as David says, ***"I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, for You Yourself have taught me."*** And so David prays to God that he may be taught the word of God, and God answers that prayer.

Over in the New Testament (in Acts 10), we have an interesting illustration of this process in the life of Cornelius—a Gentile, a Roman centurion who had been praying to God. And in response to the prayers of Cornelius, God did not give him the plan of salvation directly—God did not have an angel go teach him, there was never a voice in the night, God did not “stir his heart,” God never told him what to do directly, but God sent a Christian—God sent the apostle Peter. And when Peter got there, he explained the gospel message and he commanded that Cornelius be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Cornelius prayed, and God answered that prayer. So, we are to accept the Bible as the word of God, we are to meditate on it, and we are to pray about it.

IV. There is another key step outlined in Psalm 119, as we find that we are to APPLY THE WORD OF GOD TO OUR OWN SPECIFIC SITUATION. In other words, WE ARE TO OBEY IT! »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at the opening 8 verses of Psalm 119, and I would like for us to notice the emphasis on doing it—notice the action words—Psalm 119:1-8...

- ¹ ***How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.***
- ² ***How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.***
- ³ ***They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways.***
- ⁴ ***You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep them diligently.***

- ⁵ ***Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!***
⁶ ***Then I shall not be ashamed***
when I look upon all Your commandments.
⁷ ***I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,***
when I learn Your righteous judgments.
⁸ ***I shall keep Your statutes; do not forsake me utterly!***

The thought continues in **verse 55**, where David says, ***"O LORD, I remember Your name in the night, and keep Your law."*** He goes on in **verse 60**, ***"I hastened and did not delay To keep Your commandments."*** He continues in **verse 106**, ***"I have sworn and I will confirm it, that I will keep Your righteous ordinances."*** David took an oath that he would follow God's law, and he was apparently following through with that commitment.

One of the best ways to remember something that we read is to do it—to put it into practice. And this is also true with the word of God. When the word of God tells us to practice hospitality, the best way to understand that command is simply to do it—to invite someone into your home and to share a meal. And once we get started, we have a whole new appreciation for those verses that tell us to practice hospitality.

As James says in **James 1:21-25**, ***"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."***

I think we might agree that Satan does not really care how much we read the word of God—Satan just does not want the word of God to change the way we are living! And so the Bible teaches that we are to be ***"...doers of the word."*** After we read a passage, maybe we can write down some change that we need to make. Let us look at the word of God, let us look at our own lives, let us look back and forth, and let us change our lives to conform to the word of God. We are to apply the word of God to our own specific situation.

Conclusion & Invitation:

As we close this morning, I'd like for us to think back to where we started a few minutes ago, and the fact that very few Americans actually read their Bibles every day. A lot of that probably goes back to the idea that the Bible is simply too complicated. And yes, it is a very long book—1,189 chapters. And yet if we were to just sit down and read it from cover to cover, we could read it in just over 70 hours—not much longer than a regular work week. If we were to divide that out over a year, it comes out to right around 12 minutes every day. To put that in terms that we can

understand, if we were to cut out a 30-minute sitcom every night, we could make it through the Bible more than two times every year! And again, I do not want us to get burdened down with guilt here, but I am simply pointing out that the Bible is the word of God. And instead of getting bogged down in it and giving up, King David gives us some very practical advice concerning how we can get the most out of it.

- We need to accept it as the word of God—we need to understand how important it really is.
- We are to meditate on it—we are to mumble it to ourselves if we need to—we are to let it soak in.
- He also teaches us that we are to pray about it—like Cornelius, we can pray to God for understanding, and God will answer that prayer.
- And finally, one of the best ways to truly appreciate the word of God is to simply put it into practice—we are to obey it, we are to apply it to our lives and use it to pull our lives closer to God.

This morning, I would like for us to close with a question: What is there from the word of God that we have not yet done? Is there some area where we are holding back? The Bible was not given to us just so we can win some kind of trivia contest—the Bible is much more important than that. The Bible was given to us so that we can become more like Jesus. If there is some area where you are having a special struggle, we would encourage you to let us know so that we can pray together about that.

Maybe you are not yet a Christian. The Bible teaches that we imitate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus by being baptized. We turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of sins, and we are raised up to begin the Christian life. If you know that this is something you need to do, then do it! Please, do not leave this building without making sure that you are in a right relationship with God. If you have any questions, we would love to study with you after the service, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know about your decision as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org