

Know His Word
The A, B, C's of Psalm 119

Introduction

I became a Christ-follower in college. Before that time, I had no real desire to read the Bible. Actually, **I had no desire to read anything!** I remember leaving for college and listening to my mom saying, "Take your Bible with you." I replied, "Why?" She said, "You might read it one day." But I didn't open that Bible until I was a Sophomore when God radically changed my life. Soon after, I purchased a **massive study Bible**, and began reading the Bible like a **glutton at Golden Coral buffet**.

I couldn't get enough of the Word. A group of us read through it in two weeks. God gave me the ability to retain what I read and began transforming my mind. I even wrote on the outside edges of my Bible, "**It's alive!**" And it is. Then I went to **seminary** – oh the reading! **No pictures! Hermeneutics? Who is that? Is he a Latin American shortstop? No, that's a class on interpreting the Bible.**

If we are going to have a living faith, then we need to consume the living Word. We don't live by bread alone but on every word of God.

- **Author**: in Psalm 119 we meet a young man in love with God and his word. **We don't know who he is. Whoever he was, he seems to be young (9, 100), and he seems to be encountering opposition (21, 39, 51, 61, 69, 92).**
- **He uses 8 Synonyms for Scripture in Psalm 119 —*law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word, promise (or word)* (Kidner).** They are all used to refer to the written word of God. They refer especially in the books of Moses, but for our application as Christians, we may simply understand them to mean "the Bible."

- His **central theme** of Psalm 119 is the importance of the **Word of God for shaping one's thoughts and ways**. It bears great similarity to Psalm 1 and Psalm 19, and 112.
- **Length**. 176 verses. Eight verses under the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first letter of each stanza begins with that Hebrew letter. It's amazingly beautiful. According to one commentator, **George Wishart, Bishop of Edinburg, 17th century**, was to be put death for his faith. The policy, however, was that the condemned could pick a Psalm to be sung before being executed. He picked 119. While on the scaffold, before the song was over, a pardon arrived – and his life was spared! Pick this Psalm if you need time!
 - There is no flow of argument in the Psalm. It is more reflective and poetic, driving the central theme home, by emphasizing it in different ways.
- **Plan**: What I want to do is identify 10 themes under the first three letters (24 verses). Most of them come in the first 16 verses. We will use the remaining verses in Psalm 119 to support these themes.

1. Know the Blessing of Walking in the Word (1-2)

Blessing (1-2). The Psalm begins **like Psalm 1**, which opens up the book of Psalms by saying, "Blessed is the man.... But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates, day and night." **Psalm 1 is like a doorway into the Psalter, saying that if you want blessing on your life, then delight in the law of the Lord. It doesn't mean "financial blessing" or "material blessing" (though God may do that), but *spiritual blessing*.**

Spiritual satisfaction, joy, purpose, significance, hope, salvation. These are found by walking in God's word.

In Psalm 119, many blessings are enumerated like: guidance (105), life (73), wisdom (97), joy (111), strength (28), hope (43), and satisfaction (162), peace (165).

Blameless (1)– Notice that to be blameless means to walk in the law of the Lord. God's law teaches us *to love him and neighbor, to do justly and love mercy, and to be holy as God is holy.*

Notice:

- The law is good. The Psalmist loves it. The Apostle Paul said he “delighted in it” (Rom 7:22).
- Yet, we are struck with an impossible standard. We can't walk according to God's law perfectly. Right! This leads to an important point...

As believers in Jesus Christ, we understand that only one lived out Psalm 119 perfectly.

Through him, in him, because of him, we can know live it out as well – not perfectly but faithfully.

And we know that when we fail, that God won't crush us, for he already crushed his Son for us.

All of the points I am about to make, should be viewed in light of Jesus, who fulfilled God's law for us, and now by the Spirit empowers us to walk in God's word.

The word drives us to Jesus, and Jesus empowers us to keep his word, and when we fail we have an Advocate.

Blessed are those who keep his testimonies (2a)

Here again this point is reinforced. Blessing comes by keeping his testimonies.

2. Worship the Author of the Word (2b, 7)

Verse 2a points us to the author of Scripture. Notice how the switch is made “who seek **HIM** with their whole heart.” **We love the Scriptures because they get us to God. We worship the author of the Bible.**

Through the word, we meet with God.
We commune with God in his word.

I love the scene in **Nehemiah 8** – the word is read, and then they worship! Why? Because when we understand the word, we are moved to worship – in repentance, confession, celebration, praise.

The connection between the word and worship gets made again several times in Psalm 119, **when I learn your righteous rules**... “with my whole heart, I seek **YOU**” (10). “Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me” (175)

Virtually every verse of this Psalm refers to the author of Scripture: “your precepts,” “your statutes,” “your righteous rules”

Storms: “God’s Word is exquisite, sublime, splendid, and sweet. God’s word is powerful, faithful, righteous, and true. God’s Word is great, glorious, grand and good. Why? Because in it we see God. Through it, he draws near.”

Further, we sing to God in **response** to his revelation of himself:

- “I will praise you *when I learn your righteous rules*” (7)
- “Your statutes have been my song in the house of my sojourning” (54)
- “At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules” (62)
- “My lips pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. My tongue will sing of your word” (171-72)

We don't worship the God if our imagination but of revelation.

3. By God's Grace, Obey the Word (1-6, 8, 17, 21-22)

One can't miss the frequent emphasis on "keeping" or "obeying God's word. (Read verses)

21: Negativity is expressed from those who don't obey the word.

Again, this happens through Christ, who empowers our obedience. We obey by God's grace.

"Deal bountiful we me" (17) or "be gracious to me" that I may keep your word. We pray for grace as we obey God's word.

- "I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise" (58)

It's important to remember that we express our love through obedience to God. "If you love me, obey my commands" (John 14-15).

In light of the new birth, James says be a doer of the word (**James 1**). What if I told my kids – go clean your room. Did you clean your room?– "No. I memorized what you said... I can say it in Greek – we're going to do a small group on it." – That's just hearing, and learning (I'd be impressed with that!) but its not doing.

"Knowledge that does not lead to action serves only to breed arrogance and pride" (Storms)

The Psalmist speaks of perseverance under persecution and affliction throughout this Psalm (cf., **86-87; 157, 161**). In the face of opposition, his heart is set on obeying him.

4. Marvel at the Divine Nature of the Word (7b)

The divine nature of Scripture is exalted here.

- “righteous” (7, 75, 144, 164)
- “good” (39)
- “forever your word is firmly fixed in the heavens” (89)
The Bible is unlike any other publication. Newsweek, and other publications have constantly taken shots at the Bible. During Christmas, Newsweek chose to feature an article that denied the historical reality of Christmas written by Ehrman. I found it fascinating that *they chose this subject as one of their last print editions*. They took on the NT! But Newsweek is going out of print, but the Bible is not. (ht: Mohler)
- “word of truth” (43) ... “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever” (160). We believe in truth.
"I am using the **truth**, Master Wayne. Maybe it's time we all **stop** trying to outsmart the **truth** and **let it have its day**" (Alfred)
- “sure” (86)
- “wonderful” (129)
- “light” (130) – for the simple! This verse highlights the doctrine of clarity of Scripture. Any Christian can learn the Bible. If you have a heart of humility, then you can learn God’s word.
- "your promise is well tried and your servant loves it" (140)
- “my heart stands in **awe** of your word” (161)
 - Notice where the word should affect you: the heart.

Implication of its nature is point 3 – submit to it.

Next three weeks: **marriage** - culture has many opinions.
But this (Bible) is the bottom line for us.

Illustrations

- **We are under it, not over it**

Someone's the authority of your life – who is it? The inclination of the heart is to be like our first parents in the garden and question God.

We place our whole lives under it; our families; our church; our worship. Lady once told me "There's too much laughing and clapping in the church." I responded by quoting Ps 47. She said, "I knew you'd quote the Bible." **Let's not bring this antiquated book into discussion!**

But not only do we not take away from it; we don't add to it – that's what legalists do with their endless religious lists that one must do to be saved.

5. Experience the Sin-Killing Power of the Word (9, 11)

Verses 9-11 help us get a bit more specific with application. The Scriptures have the ability to change us, as God's Spirit works in us.

A. **Question:** "How can a young man keep his way pure?"
(9a)

This is not a pressing question to the world. But it is the question for this young man, and God's people. ***Over 2500 years after this was penned, and it is still the question.***

Look at the following verses, which express this deep desire for purity:

- "Do not let me wander" – (10) – "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, here's my heart, take and seal it."
- "Incline my heart to your testimonies, not to selfish gain" (36)
- "Turn my eyes from worthless things" (37)
- "I incline my heart to perform your statutes" (112)

- “Let no iniquity get dominion over me” (133)

B. **The Answer:** By Guarding it according to your Word (9b)

This reminds us of Proverbs, which provides instruction, as from a father to a young son.

God’s word tells us what sin is. That’s an important step for purity. Our culture is confused as to what sin is, and even celebrates it. "They practice and give approval" (Rom 1:32)

God also uses his word to change us from the inside out, as we read it. **Verse 9** –“ I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

- Notice, who we sin against: God. - **Joseph**
- Notice how we keep from doing it: the Word.
- Notice the place for storing it: the heart. The Scripture is inside of me, not just on a tablet outside of me. God’s Words are to be kept on the inside.
- Jesus said everything starts with the heart – not the physical heart but the invisible heart – out of the heart the mouth speaks. “Where did that come from?” the heart.

We are made holy, by the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Holy Bible.

God’s Word is not the only means of grace that we have to maintain holiness; we need community, prayer, and more. But I don’t know if anything is emphasized more as the means for purity more than the word of God.

Jesus – “sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth (**John 17:17**); “washing of the water with the word” (Eph 5); (cf., Hebrews 4:12-13)

6. Pray for God’s Help for Understanding the Word (12, 18)

Another repeated theme in Psalm 119 is the praying for God’s help in understanding the word. The Psalmist does not trust in his own ability to do this.

- “Blessed are you oh Lord, *teach me* your statutes” (**12**)
- “Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things...” (**18**)
- “*Make me understand* your precepts” (**27**)
- “*Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes*” (**33**)
- “Give me understanding” (**34, 75, 125, 144, 169**)
- “teach me your statutes” (**64, 68, 124, 135, 171**)

These are wonderful prayers each time you open up the Scriptures.

He also speaks about how God uses affliction to teach us his word. He’s able to accept it because of this blessing.

- "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes." (**71**)

7. Faithfully Declare the Word (13)

- The Psalmist desires to not only know it and obey it, but to speak it to others.
- Later he says, "I will speak of your testimonies before kings" (46)
- He is not only a learner but a teacher. (**Coffee shop: Matt and Matt**).
- “my lips” and “your mouth” – He says in effect “May my mouth faithfully proclaim what you have said.”

App:

- Everyone is to teach in some capacity (Matt. 28:16-20)
- Be reproducers not just receivers.
- Psalm 96 – “Declare” it among the nations

8. Yearn for and Delight in the Word (14, 16, 19-20)

In light of the nature of God’s word, and the sin-killing power of it, it makes sense that the Psalmist would hunger for it.

Yearning:

- “I am a sojourner on earth; hide not your commandments from me” (19)
- “My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times” (20)
- “I long for your precepts” (40)
- I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments” (131)
- “I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words” (147)
- I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil” (162) - metal detector

Delight:

- “In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches” (14)
- I will delight in your statutes” (16)
- Your testimonies are my **delight** “ (24, cf., 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174).
- “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (103)
- “Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart” (111)
- The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (72)

- I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold” (127)

What do you delight in? (Jubala espresso)

God's Word is sweeter than honey and better than gold or cappuccino!

Our desires change when we become Christians. Peter says that when new birth happens we begin to crave Scripture like a baby craves milk (1 Pet. 1:22-2:2). So we don't "have to read Scripture." We get to read Scripture. We want to read Scripture. **No one should tell me "You have to kiss your wife, don't you?" No. I get to. I love her.**

But there are periods of our journey, when our hearts grow cold, and we must repent for fresh desire and delight.

9. Mediate on the Word (15, 23)

He speaks of "fixing his eyes" on the word, and meditating on them. (15)

Here is the path to experience what we've mentioned in the previous points. You must mediate on Scripture. God's Word must take root in our hearts. (11)

Think of meditating on the word as the act of *reading, thinking on, praying, memorizing, discussing, hearing, or singing God's word.*

Eastern meditation is emptying the mind, but Christian mediating is filling the mind – with God's word.

The goal is "to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." (Col 3:16). That is, live in the Word, like it's your spiritual house. Abide in it. Let it saturate your soul. Let it affect you through and through.

I memorized Psalm 119 - "Not sure where I put it."

Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you" ask what you will. D.A. Carson says, Jesus is "getting at the same truth," that is, we commune with Jesus by abiding in his words.

Heart: a parrot can memorize. Every addict knows a few verses. Satan knows verses. The difference? Its not in the heart.

A. What Psalm 119 teaches us about Meditating on the Word

- a. While others plot, mediate on God's Word (23)
- b. When down, get up and going, by mediating on the word (25-32)
- c. Delight in God through meditation (47-48)
- d. While others make false accusations, meditate on the word (78)
- e. Meditate on it all day (97)
- f. Grow in understanding beyond your years by meditating on it (99)
- g. Rise early to mediate on the Word (148)

Do you understand your need for meditating on Scripture?

Hundreds of issues would be taken care of in our lives if God's Word got into us richly.

As a pastor, teacher, and counselor, I have repeatedly seen the transformation of inner and outer life that comes simply from memorization and meditation upon Scripture. (Willard)

If I were the devil (please no comment), one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God ... I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalents of pits, thorn hedges and man traps, to frighten people off. (J.I. Packer)

B. Why Don't People Meditate on the Word? (What are the traps that the devil uses?)

- **Pride** – Some arrogantly think they don't need it. (cf., Isaiah 66:2)
- **Misguided Fear** – Some are intimidated by the Bible. They think only the clergy can understand it. Not so! (119:130; 19:7). Have you ever considered that Paul wrote a letter like **Romans** to “laypeople,” not seminarians? He **expected farmers, blacksmiths, tentmakers, shopkeepers, mothers,** and other Christians to understand his letter. God's people can understand God's Word if they approach it with a heart of humility, seeking to obey it. Theologian, Wayne Grudem says, **“No believer should think himself or herself too foolish to read Scripture and understand it sufficiently to be made wise by it.”**
- **A belief that the Bible is boring.** Some find no joy in meditating on the word. Remember, the fault is not in the Bible, but in the reader.
 1. **Test yourself to see if you are truly born again (1 Peter 2:1-3).**
 2. **Pray.** Pray for God to teach you and give you a love for his word. (cf., **Psalm 95** – every day Psalm). Do not harden your heart. Pray hard for the Spirit to illuminate God's Word so that it burns in your heart (Luke 24:32).
 3. **Look for the gospel in the Bible - the good news!** Angels long to look at the gospel! (**1 Pet. 1:12**). It never gets boring.
 4. **Test your lifestyle to see if you are addicted to entertainment to the point that you can't slow down enough to read quietly and meditatively.** If so, unplug for a season and read. Maybe the fast this week helped you.
 5. **Consider selecting a fresh reading plan and study plan.** Ask a pastor or a mature Christian for some good study resources to recommend.
- **Business** - Part of the exercise of meditating on Scripture is *making time*. One must plan to spend ***unhurried and***

unhindered time with God. No one oozes into Christ-likeness. You don't accidentally become a student of Scripture. Prioritize **sitting at the feet of Jesus like Mary, who chose what was best (Luke 10:38-42).**

- **III:** Whenever someone presents this problem of business to me, or if I feel myself trying to use this excuse, I'm reminded of a particular cartoon. **An overweight man is looking at the doctor who is obviously hearing from the patient that "he's too busy to exercise."** To which the doctor responds, **"What fits your busy schedule, exercising one hour a day or being dead twenty-four hours a day!?"**

William Wilberforce, the British statesman, who was largely responsible for the abolition of slave trade throughout the empire, wrote in his diary in 1819, "Walked from Hyde park Corner, repeating the Psalm 119 in great comfort." That was a busy man.

- **Laziness** - We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work.
- **Unbelief.** An unbelief in the value of Scripture will keep you from God's Word. **Do you really believe its more valuable than gold? Do you believe that faith comes from hearing it? That joy is derived by understanding it? That God transforms us through it? That we desperately need the gospel every day? Do you realize how much you need it to share the gospel, to counsel others and fight the good fight.**
 - **You memorize all kinds of stuff...**
- **"I am the wrong age"**
 - **David Livingstone, pioneer missionary to Africa, won a Bible from his Sunday school teacher by repeating Psalm 119 by heart – when he was 9 years old.**

- Kids in Madrassas are memorizing the Koran
- “I’m too old – I’ve hidden it in my heart, but I don’t know where I put it!.” Get back at it.
- “I have seen the disciplined memorization of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 change a man’s life.” – Kent Hughes

In The Pilgrim’s Progress, there’s a scene when Christian recalls in the dungeon of Doubting-Castle that he has a key to the door. What’s interesting is not only the key but where the key is located. **“What a fool I have been, to lie like this in a stinking dungeon, when I could have just as well walked free. In my chest pocket I have a key called Promise that will, I am thoroughly persuaded, open any lock in Doubting-Castle.”** “Then,” said Hopeful, “that is good news. My good brother, do immediately take it out of your chest pocket and try it.” Then Christian took the key from his chest and began to try the lock of the dungeon door; and as he turned the key, the bolt unlocked and the door flew open with ease, so that Christian and Hopeful immediately came out.

God’s word in our “chest pocket” (our heart) can get us out of our prisons. Get out of that stinking dungeon.

C. How?

- **James Stalker: (1) Large, (2) Varied, (3) Original communion with God (walk, listen, memorize by writing, art)**

You need a book and a nook and a hook (a plan)

- **Ill: Sitting on a plane last week between two people who talked non-stop about their sail-boats. I put on my headphones. “Did you get any work done.” Oh yes. I have five kids. This is what I do. I have written books, and sermons with kids all around me.**

- **Get a good Bible. Get a good spot, a good chair, or a walking plan. I've memorized several Psalms, and now I'm doing 146 and 104.**
- **Keller. A man said "When you are really prepared, you quote lots of sources. When you're not, you just quote CS Lewis." Why? Because he has read everything Lewis has written and it's stored up within him so that when he speaks off the cuff he thinks about it. So it should be with the Bible.**

10. Rest in the Truly Blessed Man of the Word

Scholars have rightly pointed out that in Psalm 1, the truly blessed man points to Jesus.

Psalm 1 begins like Joshua 1. Joshua is the second division of the Hebrew Bible. Psalms is the first book if the third. Both speak of the importance and blessing of the word.

He kept the law perfectly on our behalf. That's the good news of the Bible. "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no guile."

The same is true here in Psalm 119. Though perhaps not intended like Psalm 1, theologically we know this to be true.

- He kept the testimonies
- He did no wrong
- He kept the word diligently
- He kept his way pure
- He never wandered from the commandments
- He had the word stored up in his heart
- He declared the word
- He delighted in the word
- He was the sojourner on earth
- Though princes plotted, he meditated on God's word

Jesus Christ provides salvation to everyone who has fallen short of the standard of God's Word.

God made him who knew no sin to be made sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)

Last verse in Psalm 119. Look at 176:

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant"

Even though the Psalmist has this exemplary determination to keep God's word, he is torn because he knows that he doesn't do it perfectly. He needs to be saved. "This is the cry from a broken spirit." (VanGemeren)

The Psalmist is acknowledging his need. Do you?

**Though the Psalmist knows the Bible, he isn't a Pharisee.
He prays like the tax collector instead, "Have mercy on me a sinner."**

We need the One who never went astray, to rescue us, to change our hearts and give us power to obey.

If you feel as though you can't measure up, look only to Christ. M'Cheyne said it well, "For everyone one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.**"**

He ultimately traded places with believers. He was forsaken, so that we might be brought into the fold.

Know the word of Christ. Know the Christ of the Word. That is where blessing is found, in a person, Jesus Christ. Come to him. Rest in him.