

The Joy of Relationship through God's Word

Psalm 119

Main Idea:

God wants us to know Him and walk with Him as we meditate on what He has said.

You should be thanking the Lord that Stan called me at the last minute and asked me if I could pinch hit for him this morning. That is because I'm preaching on Psalm 119, and I really didn't have a whole lot of time to prepare to preach on all 176 verses! When Stan sent out an e-mail to the service planners and the staff about the change, Cole wrote and told me that he was going to be disappointed if I didn't preach on every verse. Brad responded that he would be both disappointed and hungry if I preached on every verse! Of course, we all know that Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Because of that, it would be impossible to do an in depth study of the whole Psalm in one service.

A few weeks ago, I preached on Psalm 19 about God revealing Himself, first in creation and then in His law. Psalm 119 is an amplification of Psalm 19:7-11 where it says:

"The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them." (NLT)

I normally do not appreciate it when a speaker says, I don't have enough time this morning to read the passage I'm going to preach on, but I'm choosing to do exactly that, not reading the whole chapter this time. Please stand with me though, and read the sampling of verses that I've excerpted from the Psalm and put on the screen. Please notice who is to read each slide.

LEADER

¹How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
²How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all their heart.

MEN

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping it according to Your word.
¹⁰With all my heart I have sought You;
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.
¹¹Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.

¹⁷Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.
¹⁸Open my eyes, that I may behold

Wonderful things from Your law.

ALL

⁷³ Your hands made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
⁷⁴ May those who fear You see me and be glad,
Because I wait for Your word.
⁷⁵ I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous,
And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
⁷⁶ O may Your lovingkindness comfort me,
According to Your word to Your servant.
⁷⁷ May Your compassion come to me that I may live,
For Your law is my delight.

ALL

⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven.
⁹⁰ Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations;
You established the earth, and it stands.
⁹¹ They stand this day according to Your ordinances,
For all things are Your servants.
⁹² If Your law had not been my delight,
Then I would have perished in my affliction.
⁹³ I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have revived me.
⁹⁴ I am Yours, save me;
For I have sought Your precepts.

WOMEN

⁹⁷ O how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day.

¹⁰³ How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ From Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.

LEADER

¹¹⁶ Sustain me according to Your word, that I may live;
And do not let me be ashamed of my hope.
¹¹⁷ Uphold me that I may be safe,
That I may have regard for Your statutes continually.

ALL

¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come before You, O LORD;
 Give me understanding according to Your word.
¹⁷⁰ Let my supplication come before You;
 Deliver me according to Your word.
¹⁷¹ Let my lips utter praise,
 For You teach me Your statutes.
¹⁷² Let my tongue sing of Your word,
 For all Your commandments are righteousness.
¹⁷³ Let Your hand be ready to help me,
 For I have chosen Your precepts.
¹⁷⁴ I long for Your salvation, O LORD,
 And Your law is my delight.

As we take a closer look at Psalm 119, I want to give you some introductory observations that deal with the whole psalm. Then we will look more closely at a sampling of some of the verses.

There is no specific historical heading attached to this psalm such as you see in many of the psalms. It seems that this only highlights that it has been assigned timeless applicability for all ages. This is only logical because the psalm's central focus is the timeless truth and the timeless applicability of God's Word.

Because of the complex poetical construction of this psalm, it seems to me that it would be impossible for more than one person to be the author – unless it were some group of the Levitical worship leaders who collaborated to write it.

But the use of the personal "I" throughout the psalm makes me think that it surely had to be written by one individual. Many scholars believe that it was written by David, Daniel, or Ezra, each of whom went through some of the personal situations revealed by the psalmist between the lines of text. The maturity of the psalmist's personal relationship with God certainly elevates the psalm to the level of one of David's. It is evident that the psalmist had a long relationship with God, going through all experiences of life in God's presence as did David.

Next I want you to notice that all but two of the 176 verses speak specifically about something that God has said, that is, they speak about His Word. Throughout the psalm, words like precepts, commandments, laws, ordinances, or statutes are used to refer to what God has said. Though the focus of the psalm is the Word of God, there is not much point as one reads it, to analyzing specific additional information each particular verse gives us about God's Word through its choice of synonyms. In fact, as you read it, you can get the most out of it by reading the psalm as the poetry it is intended to be instead of trying to interpret it phrase by phrase as one would interpret narrative or didactic text.

Notice in your Bible, that the poem is divided into 22 eight-verse sections, each of them titled with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the 22 sections is alliterated, so since the first section is titled *Aleph*, in the Hebrew manuscripts, the first letter of each verse in that section is *Aleph*. The second section is titled, *Beth*, and the first letter for each of the verses is *Beth*. And so it goes throughout

the psalm. Just think how much that would help you, if you were a young person at Hebrew school having to memorize the psalm!

In each reading of the chapter, it seems that the Spirit of God causes different verses to jump out at the reader, depending on the circumstances in which the reader finds himself as he reads. Those verses bear greater analysis at that particular time, but the next time that person reads the chapter, other verses will undoubtedly stand out. Yet the reader will find himself resonating with all the words of the psalmist more and more as he reads the poem again and again!

Unlike most other portions of Scripture, this psalm is almost impossible to outline. Rather than a build-up of related ideas presented in a logical sequence, the impact of the psalm comes from the cumulative force of all the statements recognizing the divine origin of what God has said and its applicability in the author's life.

Yet there seems to be a progression through the psalm from the perspective of a young man in the early part, to that of a more mature person toward the end. It's almost as if the author were making a collection of verses as he progressed through life, or maybe as if he were near the end of his life, reflecting on his life from the beginning to the end as it related to God's Word.

The only other thing I've noticed about the relationship of ideas in the psalm, is the way that in each octet of verses, the psalmist highlights his personal relationship to God Himself through His Word. As God reveals Himself in what he says in the psalm, the psalmist responds personally to God. Here is a brief sampling of God's attributes as He has revealed Himself in the words of the psalm. God is revealed as:

- Eternal (verses 90,152)
- Faithful (verse 86)
- Righteous (verses 7, 62, 75, 106, 123, 138, 144, 160, 164, 172) Light (verse 105) Pure (verse 140)
- Truthful (verses 43, 142, 151, 160) Trustworthy (verse 42)
- Unchanging (verse 89)
- Kind and Compassionate (verses 76-77)

So as we read through the psalm today, it's as if God were saying, "I want you to know me" and we respond along with the psalmist, "I want to know You."

We should always be careful to not look at God's Word only in an academic way, missing the point of the Scriptures. We don't want to make the mistake of the religious rulers who were reproved by Jesus when He said, "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.*" (Jn. 5:39-40) God wants us to know Him and walk with Him as we meditate on what He has said. So just as the psalmist did in Psalm 119, we need to apply those Scriptures in our personal walk with the Lord.

Now I want to turn our attention to some specific sample verses for a few "sermonettes" before we finish this morning. We read earlier in verses 9-11:

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
 By keeping it according to Your word.
¹⁰ With all my heart I have sought You;
 Do not let me wander from Your commandments.
¹¹ Your word I have treasured in my heart,
 That I may not sin against You.

The psalmist highlights the young man because typically a young man struggles to control himself in the area of personal purity. No matter how old you get, temptation never gives up on trying to trip up a person, but particularly as the young man is getting out on his own, temptation targets him. As any of you men know, temptation is stronger than you are. You will never have victory over temptation without help.

How then can a young man keep his way pure? The only way to keep your way pure, young man, is to keep living your life according to the Word of God. God tells you in His Word how to escape temptation. For instance, Proverbs 6:20 through 7:27 gives specific warning and instruction to the young man regarding personal purity in his walk.

In this portion of His Word, God says, "Don't be deceived. Don't be fooled by the immoral woman's smooth tongue or coy glances. Don't be fooled into thinking you will get away with immorality. You won't! There will be lasting consequences to immorality. Don't be a fool. Don't go down her street. Learn to identify that type of woman early by her dress and by her brash, rebellious behavior. Stay far away from that type of woman. Recognize that if you choose to go down this path, it is the path that leads to certain death."

Jesus said in Matthew 5 that if you are tempted through what you see, take any extreme measure to not succumb to the temptation coming to you through the eye gate. And Romans 13:14 says that we should "...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

If you have truly put your trust in God to save you, then you will commit to what He tells you to do. As you commit yourself to obedience, then as you obey His Word, it is God Himself who saves you when you are tempted.

You see, there is help in God's Word for a young man to keep his way pure. But that highlights the necessity of a young man hiding God's Word in his heart. In that moment of temptation, he will not be able to whip out his Bible and read again what God has said. He needs to have God's Word treasured in his heart so that he doesn't sin against the Lord! He will have victory over temptation when he enters into relationship with the all-powerful God through His Word!

Let's look at another example. Maybe you feel like you need direction this morning, kind of as if you were wandering in the dark. Figuratively, you are afraid of stubbing your toe or even falling off a cliff as you try to make your way. But in the darkness, you do not find anyone to guide you. Listen to what the psalmist says in verse 105.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

I love it that the psalmist doesn't say, "The Bible is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Rather he ties the text to God Himself. "Your word..." God Himself is lighting my way through the darkness. He speaks to me as I grope for my way. It's true that there is direction for me in the Bible, but I have to realize that it is God's Word; it is the Lord who will speak to me.

It won't be through an internet blog or through a caring counselor that I will get real direction from God. It will be through God's Word. A blogger or a caring counselor will be able to help me in my darkness and befuddlement only as that person puts in front of me what God has said in His Word. As he brings God's Word to my attention, God Himself becomes the lamp to my feet and the light to my path.

Now for our last sermonette, I invite you to look at verses 73-77.

*73 Your hands made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
74 May those who fear You see me and be glad,
Because I wait for Your word.
75 I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous,
And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
76 O may Your lovingkindness comfort me,
According to Your word to Your servant.
77 May Your compassion come to me that I may live,
For Your law is my delight."*

These verses paint a picture of an older person who has lived a little bit more of life than the young man struggling to keep his way pure. Here you see a person who knows his Creator in a personal way, but he wants more than anything else to see God's work in him. "*Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments. May those who fear You see me and be glad, because I wait for Your word.*" The psalmist wants to be known by his relationship with God.

But it isn't all roses in this relationship. You see, God has permitted affliction to come into the psalmist's life. The psalmist doesn't fault God in that. "*I know O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.*"

God is not unjust in letting him suffer as a consequence of his sin. In fact, even if he is not suffering the consequences of his sin, if the Lord didn't afflict him, God would not have been faithful to what He had said. You see, God has said that He disciplines the son that He loves. Those hard things; those things that in our humanness we would love to be rid of; those things about which we pray so often for God to remove; they are afflictions from God because He is faithful!

But even in those afflictions, the psalmist is again driven back to relationship with the Lord through what God has said! "*O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant. May Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight.*"

God's words reveal Him to be kind and compassionate. Because he is in relationship with God through His Word, even as he suffers affliction, the psalmist has life and comfort! Do you see the

main point the psalmist is making all through the psalm? He wants us to understand that God wants us to know Him and walk with Him as we meditate on what He has said.

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Main Idea:

God wants us to know Him and walk with Him as we meditate on what He has said.

Introduction to the whole psalm:

Sermonettes:

1) The young man – Vs. 9-11

2) The befuddled wanderer – Vs. 105

3) The afflicted saint – Vs. 73-77

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

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Main Idea:

God wants us to know Him and walk with Him as we meditate on what He has said.

- 1) Psalm 119 is written to be read as a single poem. Have you ever read through Psalm 119 in one sitting and gotten anything out of it? Since you have learned a little bit more about it, how might you read it differently now to understand it more as a Hebrew would as he read the whole poem?
- 2) What practical suggestions can you give to help yourself and others to understand that God's word is given to lead to a dynamic relationship with Him, not just to be a static document with good advice?
- 3) What individual verses or sections of the Psalm have stood out to you today, and why? In what specific ways can you build relationship with God in this next week as you apply those verses?