



Learning to Love God's Word

Psalm 119

It's good to be with you. My name is Mike Kelsey and I'm one of the pastors here at McLean Bible Church. I'm so glad you are watching with us today, wherever you're watching from. It's good to be gathered, even online, around God's Word.

We are in Psalm 119 this morning. Before we dive in, let me give you a little background on this Psalm. It is the longest Psalm in the book of Psalms—with 176 verses—and it's the longest chapter in the whole Bible.

Sidebar: I just want to point out that our beloved pastor David, when he was making the preaching schedule, chose the shortest Psalm with only two verses for himself last week, then he gave me the longest Psalm. And we both have the same amount of time. So pray, people, pray.

Just to give you an idea of how long this sermon might last, I found one preacher in the early 1600s who preached 190 sermons on Psalm 119. It was compiled into a three-volume book totaling 1,677 pages. Get your sleeping bag; we're going to be here for a little while. That's a lot of verses. Actually, we're not going to get to all the verses in Psalm 119, but hopefully you'll be reading it with us over the course of the week.

We're not exactly sure who the author of this Psalm is, although it's often attributed to King David. One of the things we do know—and you don't see this in the English translation but you can see it in the Hebrew—is that this is an acrostic psalm. In other words, the Psalm is structured around the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 stanzas in this Psalm. Each of the 22 stanzas has eight verses and all eight verses in each section begin with the Hebrew letter for that section. That's why in some of your Bibles you'll see headings above a section of eight verses that might say "Aleph" or "Beth" which are first two letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

This was a helpful way to memorize this amazing Psalm about God's Word, but it was also a poetic way to express the reality that even the whole alphabet isn't enough to communicate the glory of God's Word. If I could pick one verse that summarizes this Psalm—and there are several verses that summarize it—I would pick Psalm 119:97 because it is straightforward. Listen to what the writer says: *"Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day."*

Let me ask you a question. Is that how you feel about the Bible? He says, "Oh how I love your law!" No judgment in that question, but I do want to give us space to honestly answer the question. Some

of you are thinking, “Well, it depends on the week.” Let’s be honest for a second. Some of us might believe God’s Word—but do we love it?

My grandmother used to always give us natural remedies when we were growing up. She was from the South, but by this point she had been living in northeast DC for decades. It was funny, because she would give us all these natural remedies, some of which she grew herself. I would ask her, “Grandma, how do you grow a garden with no grass?” Her backyard was an alley; I don’t know how she created this stuff.

When we would scrape our knee or whatever, she would tell us, “Go break off a little piece of the aloe vera plant.” We would squeeze the leaf like we were told, but we would say, “Grandma, can we please have some Neosporin? Can we just be normal?” She would also make us drink cod liver oil. Some of you don’t even know what that means. Don’t waste your time on it. Now I see all these fish oil supplements. Grandma was way ahead of her time. I look online and see, “Carlson Wild Norwegian Fish Oil.” No matter what people say, when I look at that, I think, “You want me to pay \$49 for that same nasty stuff Grandma used to make me drink?” We used to resist drinking it, but she would always say, “It might not be good, but it’s good for you.”

I think so many of us look at the Bible that way. “I know it’s good for me, but it’s not good. It’s what I need, but not what I want.” Let’s be honest for a minute. Tell me if you resonate with any of these statements:

- “I try to read the Bible, but I don’t really get anything out of it.”
- “I find parts of the Bible really difficult to understand.”
- “I find parts of the Bible really difficult to accept.”
- “I struggle to make time to read the Bible every day.”
- “I struggle to even want to make time to read the Bible every day.”
- “There are parts of my life in which I don’t want to obey what the Bible teaches.”

Do you resonate with any of those statements? I do, in different seasons and situations of my life. Part of the reason this Psalm is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible is because God used it to transform my life and my interactions with God’s Word. It happened over time, starting when I was a college student and was first exposed to this Psalm

as we study this Psalm, I want to encourage you, nudge you, to take one step in your devotion to God’s Word. If you are part of our church and you’ve been following along with us for a while, you know there’s a tool we use when it comes to engaging the Word of God. It’s an acronym we use: MAPS which stands for **M**editating on and **M**emorizing the Word, **A**pplying the Word to our lives, **P**raying the Word, **S**haring the Word.

After we reflect on Psalm 119 today, when we come to the end of our time together, I want to encourage you to think about where you need to grow in any of these areas. I invite you to allow God to

help you grow in those areas. As we prepare to dive into Psalm 119, I want us to take a moment to pray Psalm 119:18 out loud together.

“Father, open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Amen.”

We’ll be addressing three basic questions as we look at Psalm 119. What is the Bible? What does the Bible do? And then, how shall we respond to it.?

What is the Bible?

The first thing we see in Psalm 119 is that the Bible is the Word of God. Throughout Psalm 119 the writer uses different terms to describe God’s Word. The most basic term is the word “word.” This emphasizes the fact that this is a message from God. We also see it referred to as God’s “law,” which is not law in the legal sense we use that term today. It’s not just referring to the Ten Commandments or the Mosaic Law. The Hebrew word for “law” is *torah* which means instruction that’s given in the context of a relationship, like a teacher to a student or a parent to a child.

As you read, you’ll see other terms used as well: God’s judgments, testimonies, commandments, statutes, decrees, precepts and promises. These are different ways of emphasizing different aspects of Scripture. Whenever you see any of these terms in Psalm 119, there’s one word that always is connected with it. Let me see if you notice it. I’m going to read the second section of the Psalm, verses 9-16, and let’s see if you catch this. Kids, after I finish reading these verses, I’m going to ask you, “Which word did you hear over and over again?” I’ll give you a hint. If you’ve studied grammar, it’s a possessive pronoun. Listen as I read these verses:

- ⁹ *How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.*
- ¹⁰ *With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!*
- ¹¹ *I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*
- ¹² *Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!*
- ¹³ *With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.*
- ¹⁴ *In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.*
- ¹⁵ *I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.*
- ¹⁶ *I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.*

What word did you hear over and over again? The writer mentions the Scriptures in almost every verse in this Psalm and every single time he includes the possessive pronoun “your” or something close to that. His point is, “God, when I read Genesis, I know it was written by Moses, but it’s Your Word. When I

read the prophetic books, I know they were written by the prophets, but they are Your Word.” That’s how the writer viewed the Scriptures and that’s how God’s people have always viewed the Scriptures.

This is why later in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy 3:16 where he says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God...*” God spoke. So when we read or hear the Bible, we are reading and hearing the Word of God.

Jonathan Leeman put it this way:

God’s Word is an extension of God Himself. To hear His words that comprise the whole Bible is to hear Him. To obey His words is to obey Him. To ignore His words is to ignore Him. God so identifies Himself with His words that our response to His words is our response to Him. You can measure a person’s opinion of God by his or her opinion of God’s Word.

You might say, “Hold on, Mike. The Bible is just a collection of religious writings. I believe in Jesus—just not all the stuff in the Bible.” Listen, with all due respect, the problem with that is that Jesus believed all the stuff in the Bible. You have to pay attention to how Jesus viewed the Bible, to the point where He would quote it as God’s Word and not even mention the Author.

For example, we read during His teaching in Mark 12:36, “God said...,” but then He quotes David. Jesus viewed the whole of Scripture—even though it was written by human authors—as the Word of His Father. He quotes Moses and the other Old Testament writers in the same way.

You might say, “Well, the Bible has clear errors and contradictions.” Honestly, I understand why that would bother you; I had to wrestle through that myself. But every single apparent error or contradiction has been sufficiently addressed throughout church history and most of those don’t even require deep scholarship to understand. Almost all of the apparent errors and contradictions in Scripture are resolved when we understand those passages in their appropriate contexts, so none of them should keep us from understanding what the Bible means. If you want to dive deeper into that, you can take our Christianity 101 class online. Go to mcleanbible.org/nextsteps and you’ll find our Christianity 101 class that goes into those questions.

You might say, “Well, the Bible’s teaching is outdated and offensive and downright oppressive.” Maybe there are parts of the Bible that offend us, but here’s the thing. Much of what offends us in our Western culture is celebrated in other cultures around the world. So is it possible that we’ve just misunderstood parts of the Bible? Is it possible that we’re just wrong? We have a whole class on this kind of thing on our website called “Tough Questions.”

We want you to wrestle honestly with those questions and concerns, but at some point, if you’re going to follow Jesus, you ultimately have to come to grips with the fact that the Bible is the Word of God. This is why the psalmist is so confident in the Bible. Psalm 119:86 says, “*All your commandments are sure...*” Verse 89 says, “*Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.*” Verse 160 says, “*The*

sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.” This writer has confidence in the Word of God.

Now, COVID 19 has been challenging in a lot of ways—in some serious ways and in some ways that are a little bit more superficial, like not being able to get a haircut. It’s been a challenge for me, honestly, in my walk with the Lord. How long, O Lord? My wife has been begging me for two months to let her cut my hair. But there has to be some Levitical law that says, “Thou wife shall not cut thy hair.” I told her, “I’m not doing it. I’m not allowing you to cut my hair.” But she kept on pressing, so finally last night, I caved in. I knew I had to do something about this hair.

My daughter thought it was hilarious, so she took pictures while my wife was cutting my hair. Here’s one picture for you to enjoy. You can see that I was a little nervous as she had those clippers cutting my hair, especially knowing thousands of people would be watching online today. Then at one point I heard something that took me beyond nervousness—and that’s when things got real.



This is the next photo. I moved from nervousness to downright terror. I was getting ready to call David and be like, “Bro, you’ve got to take this sermon tomorrow, because something is not right in the



back of my head.” I was genuinely concerned. She kept saying, “I’ve got this. I’ve got this.” Do you know what I literally said? “I believe you; I just don’t trust you.”

Eventually, I just took over myself and made the grave mistake of trying to finish the back of my head by myself. It’s not a good look. That’s why we don’t have any cameras behind me this Sunday—and we won’t!

Here’s the reality. This is how so many of us are when it comes to trusting God. We say, “God, I believe You, but I won’t trust You. I won’t trust Your Word. I won’t put my full weight on Your Word.” To be honest, some of our lives end up looking kind of crazy because we stop trusting God and take matters into our own hands.

Whether you are a Christian or whether you are someone exploring Christianity, the key decision you have to make is do you believe this is the Word of God? If you do, then it makes no sense to neglect it or pick and choose which parts we’re willing to accept, trust and obey. Yes, we do our work to make sure

we're accurately understanding and interpreting what it means, but once God's Word becomes clear, it only makes sense for us to trust it. God will not let us down when we trust in His Word.

Psalm 119:5 says, *"Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!"* Then listen to this confidence in verse six: *"Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments."* He says, "God, I'm putting all my weight on Your Word because it's Your Word. I trust that You will not leave me hanging." The Bible is the Word of God.

The second thing we see about the Bible is that it is the Word about God. It's not just from God—it's about God. Psalm 119:2 says, *"Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with their whole heart."* The whole Bible is God revealing Himself, testifying about Who He is and the work He does. So as we read the Bible, ultimately we seek Him.

The Bible shows us ourselves, but it's not ultimately just a mirror; it is a window that enables us to gaze at the glory of God. Honestly, I think the Bible becomes boring to us because we're treating it like a topical index. We dip in and out to get what we think we need in the moment.

Every part of the Bible, every passage, reveals more and more about God. The greatest need we is to see God. We need to see Him more and more clearly. Throughout Psalm 119 the writer exults in the attributes of God: His steadfast love. His righteousness and justice. His mercy. Just read through Psalm 119 and underline the words or phrases that reveal God's attributes. They are all over this Psalm.

The Bible is ultimately about God—Who God truly is and what God has done. Look at verse 27: *"Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works."* The Bible is not ultimately a book about what we have to do to get right with God. The Bible is ultimately about what God has done in order to make us right with Him. It's not about us pursuing God. The Bible is a book about God pursuing us.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is ultimately a story about God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, pursuing rebellious sinners and making a way, over and over and over again, for them to be rescued and restored, not because they deserve it, but because of His constant mercy and steadfast love. There's a constant cycle of rebellion and restoration throughout the Old Testament until God sends Jesus, the One Who perfectly fulfilled God's law in order to rescue us from our sin by living the perfectly righteous life we can't and we don't live, by dying on the cross for our sins and rising from the grave. He then uses His people to spread that good news to the ends of the earth until He returns one day.

This whole Psalm is full of praise and prayer because when we meditate on Scripture and see all the ways God is revealing Himself, our hearts are compelled to respond. When you open this Bible, it's not just so you can check off some religious box. When you open God's Word, it is about communing with God, experiencing God speaking to you through His Word and enjoying intimacy with Him. This is why we encourage you to have a quiet time, devotional time or whatever you call it.

What does the Bible do?

As we commune with God through His Word, God begins to work. So what does God's Word do? Or the better question is this: what does God do through His Word? God gives us joy through His Word. So many of us have bought into a very common misconception that God cares about our holiness and not our happiness. As we'll see in a few minutes, God definitely cares about our holiness, our character, our obedience to His Word. But when you read the Bible, or if you just get to know Christians who are fully surrendered to God, you see clearly that God's Word doesn't keep us from joy, it leads us to joy. The Bible never pits our holiness and our happiness against each other.

In fact, this is how Psalm 119 starts. Look at verses one and two: *"Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart."* That word "blessed" is the best English translation we can come up with, because we don't really have a word that quite captures the original Hebrew idea. It's really a simple word, but it's a profound word. It's the word that basically means "happy," but it's not just the happy emotions we feel when things go the way we want them to go. This is durable happiness that is anchored in the rock-solid foundation of God's Word. This is happiness that sprouts in our hearts, even in seasons of drought. It's what Sam Storms calls "deep durable delight in God."

Listen to how this writer describes his experience with God's Word. In every new Bible I get, since I was a college student and started really following Jesus, the first thing I do is highlight these verses in Psalm 119. I wish I had time to read all of them, but here are just a few. If these verses resonate in your heart, if you are a Christian who has experienced what we're getting ready to read and these verses resonate with your experience, then let this be a moment of personal worship for you. I just want you to slow down and let this be a moment of personal worship for you, because this is the overflow of a heart that has been transformed by the glory of God.

Listen to what he says in verse 72: *"The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."* He's trying to come up with language to describe how amazing God's Word is. So he takes a minute to think of the most valuable possession he can think of, then he says, "God, Your Word is better." He's not just talking about reading the words on a page. He's not just admiring God's Word as good literature. He's talking about the experience of communing with God and the joy that comes from walking in obedience to God.

Look at what he says in verse 14: *"In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches."* He's saying, "God, Your Word is like a treasure map. It leads me to more and more delight, more and more pleasure, more and more satisfaction. In verse 35 he prays, *"God, lead me in the path of your commandments."* Why? *"For I delight in it."*

I love the poetry in verse 103: *"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"* You can logically know that honey is sweet. You can figure it out by reading about it in some

book. But you can't really know how sweet it is until you taste it for yourself. This is what it's like to not just read, but to experience God as you walk with Him in His Word.

This is why the psalmist says in verses 44 and 45, *"I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts."* Here's why that's so important. You might say, "When I read the Bible or hear people talk about it, it doesn't seem like it leads to a wide place. It actually seems pretty narrow and restrictive." Let's just be honest for a second. Think about what the Bible teaches about sexuality and gender. Think about what the Bible teaches in all of its commands to give money away and what the Bible teaches about submitting to authority. Our culture looks at so many things in the Bible and says, "That's not joy; that's repression. That's not freedom; that's bondage." Our culture says the way to truly find joy is to follow your heart, live your truth, liberate yourself from any outside voices that try to tell you what to do. Do you want to know how to truly find joy? Do whatever you want to do. This is what our culture says to us.

But let me give you a quick illustration. I'm not the most disciplined person when it comes to my health and my fitness. Don't let the figure fool you; I'm sure it hasn't. But I decided to jump back into the gym. In my mind, I'm still 22. You know what I'm saying? I can still get out here and do whatever. So I went to the gym with this personal trainer class thing. I didn't know it was the last session of a 12-week situation. It was leg day.

So I showed up to this gym and tried the class. This trainer had me doing all kinds of crazy stuff. He had me doing lunges with a weighted vest, running steps, doing leg presses. He had me doing the sled thing that you push. I mean, this dude was trying to kill me. But I was killing it. Honestly, this was like CrossFit for dads. That's what I called it. This was for middle-aged dudes, so I was thinking, "I'm good." I was not walking up the steps with a weighted vest; I was galloping up the steps with the weighted vest.

Then, we got to one of the last exercises and something felt a little off. So I thought, "I need to take a break and just breathe for a second." I broke away from the pack so I could rest for a second. All I know is that all of a sudden I started hearing voices get louder and louder and louder. I woke up and was on the floor. I don't know what happened. Apparently I passed out. It was embarrassing like crazy. Some of them knew I was a pastor. I was laying on the floor and they trying to give me Welch's grape juice boxes to get sugar in my system. It was crazy.

I tend to do whatever I want, eat whatever I want—and you see where that led me. Now, I want you to contrast that to LeBron James. Have you read about how disciplined his regimen is? While everybody else is eating whatever they want, his food intake is very disciplined. While everybody sleeps however long they want, he gets up in the morning to work out. You might look at his life from the outside and think, "That is so restrictive." But put LeBron James on the basketball court and watch how high he can jump. Watch the 360 turns he can do. Watch him completely blaze everybody on the court. Then let me

ask you who's more free? Me, doing whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it, or LeBron James? Who's actually more free?

Here's what you've got to understand. We've bought into this misconception about freedom. True freedom is not the freedom to do whatever you want to do. True freedom is the freedom to be who God designed you to be, to live up to the full potential of who God has designed you to be and how God has designed you to live. This is how the psalmist looks at the Word of God. Yes, there are some "no's" in the Bible which are designed to lead us into a better "yes." This truth right here revolutionized my entire view of the Christian life. I remember deciding to be sexually pure as a sophomore in college in 2000. To be honest, it's not that I enjoyed abstinence from that point until eight years later when I got married.

Do you know what it was? It was that I found deeper joy in living the way God designed me to live. It was living in obedience to Him and experiencing communion with Him and the freedom that comes from a clear conscience before God. There's a joy you can only experience in letting go of the things that keep you from walking in obedience to God.

Man, there are so many blessings mentioned in Psalm 119 that we get to enjoy as we walk with God in His Word. Joy is one of them, but there are so many more. Let me mention a couple with this caveat. Sometimes joy doesn't always feel like happiness. I want to be clear about that. Sometimes we're grieving. We're suffering. God doesn't stand over us like a drill sergeant just yelling at us, "C'mon! Be joyful! Snap out of it!"

No, that's not how God operates. He doesn't break a bruised reed; He does not snuff out a smoldering wick (Matthew 12:15-21). God is gentle with our weakness. When we are suffering, God comes to us in our suffering. He not only gives us joy through His Word, but He gives us comfort through His Word. The psalmist mentions affliction over and over again. In fact, the whole concept of Psalm 119 is affliction. That background should actually encourage you, because everything you read about in this Psalm was written while he was suffering. His suffering and situation had not been tied up in a nice little bow in a testimony video. There are so many pains and problems represented in all the lives of people watching right now. This psalmist was honest about his suffering before God as he looked at God's Word.

He said in verse 28, *"My soul melts for sorrow..."* Have you ever felt like that? *"My soul melts for sorrow."* He goes on to say to God, *"Strengthen me according to your word!"* He was saying, "I don't have strength to get through this, God. Strengthen me according to Your Word."

He then says in verses 49 and 50, *"Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life."* The idea here is almost like, "This is my only comfort in my affliction"—

When the bottom falls out from under us, sometimes all we can do is cling to God's promises. *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning"* (Psalm 30:5). Light will break into the darkness one day, but in the meantime, God meets us in our suffering, comforting us and giving us

strength one day at a time through His Word. And God gives us wisdom through His Word—guidance and understanding. There are so many choices we have to make.

I was reading the summary of a book by Barry Schwartz who wrote a book called The Paradox of Choice. He talks about going to the grocery store where he found 285 varieties of cookies. Actually, that could just be Oreos. How many different kinds of Oreos are there? Barry found 285 varieties of cookies, 13 kinds of sports drinks, 65 box drinks option, 85 kids' juices, 75 ice teas, 95 types of chips and pretzels, 15 kinds of bottled water, 80 different pain relievers, 40 options for toothpaste, 150 lipsticks, 360 types of shampoo, 90 different cold remedies, 230 soups, 75 instant gravies, 275 varieties of cereal, 64 types of barbecue sauce and 22 types of frozen waffles. Have you ever thought about this before? Have you ever been overwhelmed by all these choices? And that's just grocery shopping.

Think of all the other choices we have to make in our lives. Where should I go to college? Who should I marry? Should I leave my job? And in the midst of all these choices we're trying to navigate, we're constantly bombarded by so many voices trying to give us their opinions. They're pulling us in this direction or that direction. In the middle of all this, the psalmist looks to God's Word in verse 24 and says, *"Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors."* There's also the famous verse 105, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* This is why he prays "Teach me" 11 times in this Psalm. "Teach me, God. Give me understanding. Teach me Your ways. Give me more wisdom and discernment." The Bible doesn't always tell us specifically what to do in every situation. It doesn't always tell us exactly what choices to make, but it gives us the wisdom we need to appropriately evaluate those choices.

That's the benefit of studying the Bible over time. It works like compound interest. It adds exponential value as we commit ourselves and devote ourselves to God's Word over time. It sharpens our wisdom and discernment. The more we soak our minds in God's Word, the more discernment we'll have to navigate life. God gives us wisdom through His Word.

How should we respond to it?

Here's the last thing I'll point out for us: God makes us holy through His Word. Throughout this Psalm, starting from the first few verses, there's a constant emphasis on keeping God's Word, on living it out and being devoted to what it teaches. God's Word shows us God's standard for what a holy life is like so we can know how to avoid sin and how to follow Him.

Look at verses 9-11: *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* He wants to learn God's ways in Scripture and wants them to be so deeply embedded in his heart and thought patterns that it enables him to avoid sin.

But here's the thing in this Psalm. He's not just trying to not sin. He wants to pursue godliness. That's why he says in verses 36-37, *"Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my*

eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.” Here’s the point I want to make as we get ready to wrap up. As I was praying through Psalm 119, this was a major point I felt like the Lord wanted me to share. For many Christians, I don’t think it’s outright disobedience that’s killing the vibrancy of our relationship with God. I think what’s killing our joy in the Lord is this pervasive culture of coasting, of neglect. We have a pandemic in the church, but not just of COVID 19. We have a pandemic of half-heartedness toward God and toward His Word and toward the things of God.

I don’t say that to condemn, because I’m guilty of this too at different points in my life and in certain things in my life. I say this, though, to help us see our true spiritual condition and how we are so often missing the kind of joy and vibrancy God wants us to have. Look at what the psalmist says in verses 59 and 60: *“When I think on my ways,”* —when I evaluate my life— *“I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.*” God’s Word isn’t just designed to draw us away from bad things; it’s designed to drive us toward the things that please God.

Think about your closest relationships—your family, friendships or marriage. Just imagine being in your closest relationships with people you love, but you do the bare minimum in those relationships. You avoid the big things that could destroy the relationship. You don’t cuss them out. You don’t murder them. You avoid the big things, but there wouldn’t be vibrancy in those relationships. When the relationship begins to be fun, when it begins to be life-giving, when it begins to be this all-consuming affection and devotion in a sweet friendship or marriage, is when you’re eager to celebrate this person’s birthday. It’s when you are excited to go out of your way to serve them and their preferences. That begins to fill you with joy. That’s when you begin to get real traction in your relationship. It’s not just avoiding the bad things. The transformation in the relationship happens when you begin to actively, eagerly and joyfully pursue what pleases that person.

It is the same thing when it comes to our relationship with God. For many of us, our relationship with God is suffering from half-heartedness. We’re just casually coasting in our relationship with God when we think about God’s Word.

So how should we respond when we look at God’s Word? There are so many different ways to respond throughout this Psalm. Over and over again he says, “I will. I will. I will.” Fourteen times in this Psalm, he makes these commitments. You say, “I don’t want to be half-hearted in my walk with God. I don’t want to be half-hearted in my obedience to God’s Word.” So you say, “I’m going to make a commitment today. I’ve already broken my New Year’s resolutions, so I’m going to make a new New Year’s resolution. I’m going to make a mid-year resolution.” Isn’t that how most of us have been? “I’m gonna, I’m gonna, I’m gonna...” And often we genuinely mean it, but we’re weak and sinful. We lose steam, get distracted and pursue other things as more important than God and His Word.

Listen to me carefully. This Psalm doesn’t just point us to what we should do or how we should live. It ultimately points us to our need for God’s grace, because every single one of us fall short of what

we see in Psalm 119. If you don't believe me, let me just ask you a couple questions from the first three verses. Just in your own heart, answer yes or no to the following questions. If you're a Christian or you're exploring Christianity, or if you're Muslim or some other religion, just answer these questions in your own heart.

- Has your way been blameless?
- Have you always sought God with your whole heart, holding nothing back?
- Can you honestly say, along with these first three verses, that you do no wrong and that you always walk in His ways? That you never stray from His ways in your actions, attitudes, thoughts or words?
- Can you honestly say you do no wrong?

Every single one of us if we're being honest and sane—unless we're delusional—have to answer no to all those questions. So the weight of Psalm 119 comes crashing down on us, even if we have good intentions to keep trying to live it out, because we can't perfectly live it out. None of us do. None of us can.

The Bible says God is a righteous Judge (2 Timothy 4:8). That's why in verse 155 he says, *"Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes."* We deserve the punishment of God because we don't keep His law. Most of the time, we don't even want His law. We deserve God's judgment and can't do anything in our own strength to escape His judgment or earn His forgiveness. We can't do anything so our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, because God still has to judge. He will perfectly and fully and eternally judge our sins before Him, but He doesn't want us to experience His wrath and judgment. So the good news of the gospel—and our only hope as we read Psalm 119—is that God made a way.

He sent Jesus, Who perfectly fulfilled God's Word—everything we read in Psalm 119. He sought out the Word of God. He meditated on it. He responded to temptation with it in the wilderness. Even when He was on the cross, He quoted the Word of God. He quoted the Psalms. He perfectly lived out all of God's standards in Scripture. He died on the cross for your sins and my sins, in our place, so that we don't have to pay the penalty for our own sins if we put our trust in Jesus. He then rose from the grave, so that instead of judgment, instead of being cut off from the goodness and joy of the Lord, we can have abundant life and eternal life with Him.

That is your only hope—that's my only hope—to begin a relationship with God where your sins are wiped clean, where you can grow and enjoy a relationship with God, where by His grace and power, through His Holy Spirit, you can begin to enjoy and experience the glory of God through His Word. Then one day, you will be able to enjoy Him fully and freely for all of eternity.

Listen to me as we get ready to close. If you are watching this and you don't know for sure that your sins have been totally forgiven, if you don't know for sure that when you meet God face to face, He will say, "Not guilty." If you're not persuaded that you actually have the perfect righteousness you need in

order to be accepted by God, God says today is the day for you. You don't have to earn your way into this; Jesus did it for you. So today, before you jump to clean up your life based on Psalm 119, I want to give you an opportunity to say, "God, I know I constantly fall short and deserve Your judgment. But God, I'm asking, would You please forgive me? Would You save me? Would You change my heart and help me, by Your Spirit, to experience and enjoy life lived in accordance with Your Word?"

I'm going to give you a moment to pray that prayer. But listen, if you're a Christian, and you feel under the weight of conviction that you've been neglecting God's Word or things in God's Word, then I want to encourage you with this. Listen to Revelation 3:20 and what Jesus says to His church—what He says to you. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."*

Perhaps you're feeling convicted about your neglect of God's Word. "I struggle with devotional life. I have areas I'm not open about." Jesus is not waiting for you to come groveling at His door, begging Him to let you in. Look at what He just said. He is already waiting at your door, eager to fellowship with you. So receive His grace today. Receive a fresh start today.

I want to give you a moment to pray, "Lord Jesus, would You just give me strength to trust You? Would You help me today, this week, one day at a time, to enjoy fellowship with You through Your Word?" Take a minute. Whether you need to be saved for the first time in your life or whether you need God's grace and help to experience and enjoy Him through His Word, just take a moment between you and the Lord, praying that prayer to Him.



Father, we come to You, asking that You would be merciful according to Your Word. God, I pray that anybody listening to this will genuinely and sincerely pray to You for forgiveness of their sin and that they would put all their weight and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I pray that You would honor Your Word, save them and change them.

Father, for those of us who stumble and struggle in our relationship with You and our devotion to Your Word, be gracious to meet us where we are and lead us in the path of Your commands because we find delight in that path. All of our delight is in You. All of our hope is in You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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