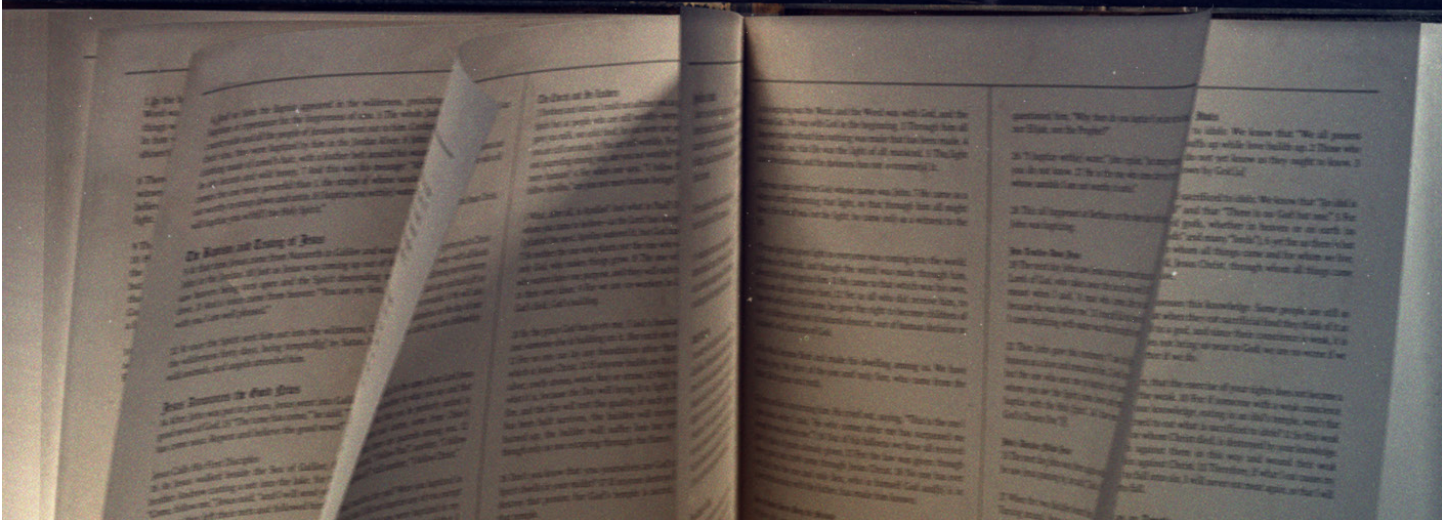
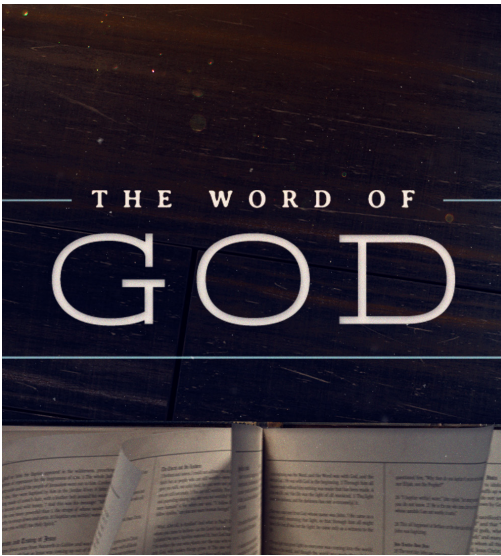


THE WORD OF
GOD



Sermon Growth Guide

November 17, 2024
The Word is My Lamp



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Word of God - The Word is My Lamp

Psalm 119:89-105

Key Verse: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." Psalm 119:105

Big Idea: The Word of God provides us with all the light we need.

Foundations

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Most likely it was written by Ezra, the prophet and scribe who had a zeal for God and God's law. He methodically wrote it as an acrostic poem, according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It contains 22 units of 8 verses each. Each section is given a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter. The poem is written to glorify God and His law. It's a love poem to the Word of God. Psalm 119 repeatedly uses eight basic words to describe the Scriptures, God's written revelation to us: Law (torah), Word (dabar), Judgments (mispatim), Statues (huqqim), Testimonies (edut/edot), Precepts (piqqudim), Commandments (miswah/miswot), and another word for Word (imrah). "This untiring emphasis has led some to accuse the psalmist of worshipping the Word rather than the Lord; but every reference here to Scripture, without exception, relates it explicitly to its Author; indeed, every verse is a prayer for affirmation addressed to Him. This is true piety: a love of God not desiccated by study but refreshed, informed and nourished by it." (Derek Kidner)

The love that is relayed in all 176 verses of this Psalm is clear. Do we truly appreciate the value of God's Word and its unchanging nature? Read the Psalm. It is a direct and poetic proclamation of how the established Word of God demonstrates God's eternal faithfulness, God's abundant wisdom, and God's unchanging and abiding love for us. What a gift we have in the Word of God.

Understanding God's Word

Read together Psalm 119:97-105.

Who actually loves rules and order? In our human nature, do we really enjoy having laws and following them? Not really. But we need them. We need them to live together. The laws, rules, restrictions and orders throughout the Old Testament are a way for us to see God's desire to dwell with His people! God created us to be set apart, living in a civil and just society that glorifies Him and imitates His character. Out of love, God gave us these instructions and they are vital to our understanding of who God is. The law enlightens the fact that God provides everything we need for healing and cleansing—a foreshadowing of the healing and cleansing we receive in and through the blood of Christ.

Applying God's Word

Where do we tend to look for truth, hope, and wisdom? Our society continues to deny the value of God's Word and the love He expresses to us through these sacred texts. But the light of the Word cannot be extinguished. In what ways can you seek the Word of God to guide you this week?

Witnessing God's Word

Chuck Swindoll wrote, "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture." How can memorizing Scripture help you witness and share your faith with others? What passage, if you memorize it, could help you tell others about the value of God's Word?

On my drive out here from Pennsylvania in late July, I decided to take a day to hike in the Ozarks. But my plans were thwarted – Missouri was in the middle of a heatwave. A 105 degree heat index meant I had to find an alternative activity to occupy my time. And I chose to explore one of the nearby caverns. There were stalactites and stalagmites, streams of water and signs of life. But the most memorable part of the tour came when we reached the deepest part of the cave. Our guide invited us to turn off our lanterns and experience the darkness...and experience we did...to the point that my mind started to play tricks on me. It was so dark that I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. But that wasn't the most uncomfortable part. In the darkness, there was an eerie silence. I was disoriented. And even though I knew someone was there, I started to feel anxious and alone. Darkness does that. Darkness tells us lies. Darkness makes us feel alone. Darkness hinders us and disorients us in any way it can. Which is why we need light. Our bodies physically crave it. Our souls do, too. Psalm 119 reminds us that we need The Word of God because it shines the light of truth, the light of hope, and the light of wisdom – necessary factors for a life that is guided by the Lord's instructions.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. The writer, most likely Ezra, had a zeal for God and God's law. He methodically composed this acrostic poem according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, all to glorify God and His law. It's a love poem to the Word of God. This love poem, composed in the 5th century, was written when our worlds were drastically different. So why would we still want to study it? Why would we want to listen to anything in this ancient book that our culture says is irrelevant, unethical, and full of judgmentalism? Because, as the Psalmist writes, "Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. (Psalm 119:89-90)

This is about the unchanging nature of God's Word. There's nothing flimsy or fragile or uncertain about the Word of God. In a direct and poetic procla-

mation, Psalm 119 says the established Word demonstrates God's faithfulness—a faithfulness that is eternal. And we cannot forget how precious this is: to know the eternal, everlasting, heaven-established value of God's faithfulness and of His Word.

Do you value the Word of God? Do you value the Word like a treasured family heirloom or a friendship that has lasted for decades? Do you value the Scriptures like you value seeing the sunshine after a Colorado snowpocalypse? When we truly grasp the worth of something, we become more inclined to actively engage with it, we long for it, and we want to maximize its potential. Well, if that is true, statistics would tell us most Christians do not comprehend the value of the Word of God. Only about 30% of professing Christians in the United States read their Bible every day. And yet, the average American household owns 4-5 Bibles. Perhaps, because the Bible has been so readily available to us, and we can order whatever version we fancy with the click of a button, we take that everlasting value for granted.

Look at what the Psalmist writes in Verse 91 "Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you." He continues, "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life." And in verse 97, He pours out His love for the Lord and His Word, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." (verse 97). In an ever-changing world, we need to be reminded of the foundation God established for us in his laws, and that there is joy to be found in these foundational truths, not just in the easy passages about praise, promises, or green pastures.

Last week, Pastor Tim mentioned when people take on the challenge of reading through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, most people stop around Leviticus or they just skip over it altogether. But I have to say, I discovered a love for the law, for the book of Leviticus this year. In January, one of my best friends and I committed to reading through the Bible chronologically using

The Bible Recap, a daily reading plan and podcast that has kept us on track for 322 days now. On February 13th that we dove into Leviticus with trepidation. But our hearts changed.

Let me read you one of the text messages Kara sent me: "God takes sin seriously. Period. From being dishonest to loving your neighbor to murder. Do I take sin this seriously? Feeling pretty convicted." We exchanged messages throughout the week about God's mercy, the kinsman-redeemer, the attention to detail, and God's promises for those who obey him. I remember reading Tara-Leigh Cobble's summary which explains, "Leviticus is about a perfect, holy God who wants to draw near to His depraved, sinful people. It walks us through the messy process that makes that possible." (Tara-Leigh Cobble, The Bible Recap, A One-Year Guide

The laws, rules, instructions and orders throughout the Old Testament are a way for us to see God's desire to dwell with His people. They show us that our God created us to be set apart to live in a civil and just society that glorifies Him and imitates His character. Sure, reading verse after verse about offerings and sacrifices and skin disease isn't easy, but it's still vital to our understanding of who God is. The law enlightens the fact that God provides everything we need for healing and cleansing—a foreshadowing of the healing and cleansing we receive in and through the blood of Christ. God also provides us with wisdom in His Word. How many of us look for purpose or perspective everywhere but the Word of God? To what or to whom do we tend to go to first? The Psalmist says look nowhere else but the Scriptures.

Let's look at verses 98 through 100: To what or to whom do you look to first for advice, purpose or perspective? We continue to walk in a world that tells us to look for earthly answers, earthly guidance. We seek out podcasts, psychics, coaches, experts, and most of all our own education, knowledge and strength. But what happens is that we end up getting bombarded with messages that are designed to inflame our desires, instill fear, distract us and

divide us. Living in this world can be disorienting and confusing, which is why we need to look to the light that shines here in the Word of God.

Verses 101 and 102 speak of the light found in obedience: "I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me." (Psalm 119:101-102). He continues, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psalm 119:103) We need wisdom. We need nourishment. We also need guidance.

Psalm 119, verse 105 states, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." (Psalm 119:105) Tara-Leigh Cobble explains, "God's Word is both kinds of light — the whole earth flooded with the fire of a thousand suns kind of glorious absolute truth, and the individual, step-by-step kind of personal guidance we need in each moment. It's everything we need." (Tara-Leigh Cobble, The Bible Recap)

I asked my friend the other day "What exactly is light?" He's literally an astrophysicist so I figured he'd have a good sciency answer. I asked, "Is it an element?" He said, "Nope, not an element. Light is energy. Energy is the 'prime mover'...in the beginning there was light." God's Word is light! Energy! In and through the Scriptures, the love of God moves to guide us. And the Psalmist says we are guided step by step, as the Word provides just enough light to allow us to navigate a short distance without tripping. This is light, the daily illumination of God's love. At the same time, God's Word equips us with the energy of His love in the form of a headlamp that is as bright as the light of day. It informs us of God's will for us and for the world, providing us with a long-distance guidance. And it's all right here. Direction for life; lessons on forgiveness; words that help us voice grief and pain; and whole chapters on God's sovereignty; the story of God's people; and the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ himself. The light in the Scriptures also shines to expose sin, to direct us away from the darkness of sin, and to hold us accountable to his will.

This energy of God's love doesn't just move toward us, it is always drawing us back to our loving, faithful, everlasting God who desires to have a relationship with us. Our Lord, who sent His Son Jesus to dispel the darkness of sin by defeating death through his death and resurrection. And we have a sacred call to share and show this light. The Word of God was not just revealed and spoken for us. It was revealed and spoken for all of humanity.

Alistair Begg writes, "If men and women are to know real life, they must come to the light. Into the darkness of their lives, Jesus comes with the truth. To the darkness of ignorance, He is their wisdom. The darkness of their impurity is to be flooded with the light of His holiness. The darkness of their grief and loss overtaken by the light of His joy. And the darkness of physical and spiritual death exchanged for the reality of eternal light and life." (Alistair Begg, What Angels Wish They Knew)

A few years ago I was in Washington, D.C. at the Museum of the Bible. Like my time in the cavern this summer, I was fascinated by the artifacts and I went along on the tour trying to absorb as much information as possible. But this time, instead of experiencing darkness by turning off a lantern, I stepped into the illumiNations Bible Room on the 4th floor of the Museum. Here, I was immersed in an exhibit that aims to shed light on the sheer scale of Biblical translation yet to be done. On display were thousands of Bibles, coded by the progress of translation. Thousands of languages have been fully translated but over half of the 7,000 people groups in our world still have little or no access to the Word of God.

As I watched one of the video of a man in Cameroon reading from the book of Matthew in his native language of Nooni, I started to tear up because there are still 1.5 billion people who do not have the Word of God translated into their language. How much longer will we let our brothers and sisters live without this wisdom and nourishment and guidance? Because Revelation 21 tells us of the new heaven and the new earth that awaits.

John writes, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it." (Revelation 21:23-24)

Discipling the nations begins with our commitment to be guided by the Word of God. Seeing that the Scriptures are in the hands of every tribe and tongue begins with our regard for the value of these words. We are followers of Jesus Christ who once walked in darkness, how much more can we be rejoicing that we have the Word of God. We have all the light we need to follow a faithful God who assures us that the day is coming when all darkness will be dispelled, suffering, pain, and death will be no more. All ears need to hear this promise, and all eyes need to be able to read it and comprehend it for themselves.

What are the dark places in your life where you need guidance or wisdom? Where in your life do you need the light of God's Word to expose sin or to enlighten you with just how deep God's love is? If you don't have a habit of reading God's Word on a regular basis, know that there are resources, classes, and people equipped here in our congregation who would be honored to help you understand the Scriptures. And you don't have to do it alone. We all need accountability. Trust me. I wouldn't have made it through the cubits of Ezekiel without the encouragement from my friend Kara. Darkness is uncomfortable. It's lonely. It is chaos. I think back to when I was in that cavern. I didn't want to stay in the darkness. And we can't allow billions of people to remain in the darkness, either. Because if darkness was what God wanted for us, He never would have spoken the world into creation with the first words he ever spoke, "Let there be light."

This Psalm declares that we have a gift, the light that guides us and draws us closer to the Father. The energy of God's love sends us, through Christ's Great Commission, to make disciples and to make sure all can know the Word of God and the Word made flesh in Christ Jesus.