

Psalm 119 — Take Up And Read: Why do we read the Bible?

January 1, 2017

It is great to have you this morning. Actually, it is great to have anyone at church considering it is January 1. For those that were up late, the coffee bar has a special brew to keep you awake for this morning. It is called Jet Fuel. Drink it with caution.

Next week, we return to Genesis and finish the final two weeks in our Genesis series. This morning, we are doing something special. One of the goals I have for CrossWinds is that we would keep our finger in the text. That is why we preach from the Bible almost every weekend. This year I want each of us to not just put our finger in the text for 40 minutes on the weekend but I want us to open our Bibles during the week and read the Word of God on our own. This is usually called personal Bible study or a quiet time.

Why do I want us to read the Bible not just corporately on the weekend but personally during the week? This morning we will find out why.

For our text this morning, we are going to study just one chapter of the Bible. The problem is the chapter we are studying is the longest chapter of the Bible. It is Psalm 119. It has 176 verses. Don't worry, I won't read the whole chapter before I preach or we would miss lunch and maybe dinner. I will cherry pick my way through this chapter, pulling out a few key verses.

What is Psalm 119 about? Psalm 119 is a song written by David. It is song about one thing. It is a song about the Bible, the Word of God. All 176 verses are reasons why we should love the Bible.

This Psalm is written in a unique way. I call it the alphabet Psalm. Just as we have 26 letters in our alphabet, Hebrew has 22 letters in its alphabet. This Psalm is written based on the Hebrew alphabet. The first eight verses all begin with the Hebrew letter *aleph*, which is the equivalent of our “A.” The second eight verses begin with the Hebrew *bet*, which is the equivalent of our “B.” The third eight verses begin with the Hebrew *gimmel*, which is the equivalent of our “C.” The Psalm continues the rest of the way through the entire Hebrew alphabet with every eight verses all beginning with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Every verse is about one thing: Why we need to love the Bible we have in our hands.

When our army invaded Iraq in the Gulf War, the first few days of the war were called a shock-and-awe campaign. The goal was to completely overwhelm the enemy in a non-stop barrage of firepower. Psalm 119 is a shock-and-awe campaign on the greatness of the Bible we have in our hands. Its goal is to overwhelm us with the greatness of the Bible

As we study this Psalm, I will break our study up under three headings. The first two tell us why we love this book. The third tells us how to love this book. Let’s begin by answering why we love the Bible.

We love the Bible because of what it is.

It is eternal.

Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Psalm 119:89 (ESV)

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8 (ESV)

This fall, in our move, I was surprised at the amount of junk information that wove its way into our lives. There were old newspaper sales flyers. There were paid bills that we kept from more than a decade ago, as if they were useful. My favorite were the manuals we still had for appliances we no longer owned. We had a lot of expired and irrelevant information to throw away. This is where the Bible is different. The Bible is God's Word. It is not man's word. God's words last forever. They have value forever. For all of eternity in the new heavens and the new earth, this book will exist. In heaven, we will have this Bible because God's words have no expiration date. When the New Testament was written 2,000 years ago the words were relevant and powerful. God used them to create and sustain spiritual life. Today, 2,000 years later, the same words are just as powerful and relevant today as they were in the past.

This means when you go home this afternoon, you may want to read the manual on how to use that new oven you purchased for Christmas. There is nothing wrong with that information. We must remember that 10 years from now that information will be irrelevant and useless. If this afternoon you went home and read the Bible, everything you learned would be applicable and relevant to your life until your dying day.

It has infinite value.

**The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.
Psalm 119:72 (ESV)**

David said that if you have a Bible, it is worth more than winning the lottery. Since the Bible is the eternal word of God, it is worth more than money. It is better to be a poor man or woman with a Bible than to be Donald Trump

without a Bible. What we hold in our hands is the eternal word of God which is beyond monetary value. If you have to make a choice between having a Bible or being a billionaire, having a Bible is the better choice.

Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.
Psalm 119:37 (ESV)

This life has many things to take our time. There is time with friends. There is time studying. There is time at work. There is time playing video games. The truth is there is lots of time in life that we can fritter away on worthless things. David's prayer, as he talks about the Word of God, is that God would turn his heart away from worthless wastes of time and that God would help him to pour his life into things that have lasting value. In the context of this Psalm, what has lasting value is reading, studying, knowing and obeying the Word of God. This book is the only book that will last forever because it is God's very words and it has infinite value. Lord, turn me away from worthless wastes of my time.

When we look at our lives, how many of us are frittering away our time while the Bible, the Word of infinite value sits on our desks?

It is the truth.

Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true. Psalm 119:142 (ESV)

Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law! Psalm 119:29 (ESV)

If you are like me, you are frustrated with the media. In this past election, it was obvious that the media wasn't reporting the news. Reporters were putting their spin on the news. This was happening against both parties. When news

becomes spin, it is difficult to know the truth. We end up frustrated because we don't like when people manipulate us. We just want to know the truth.

When we come to God's Word, we have the truth. The Bible is the ultimate no-spin zone. There are things that are hard to understand in the Bible and there are things we can misunderstand in the Bible but whenever the Bible tells us something it tells us truly, and it can be trusted. It is straight-up truth. It is without error. God doesn't lie. God always speaks the truth and since this book is God's eternal Word, we know it is the truth.

It is our protection in times of trouble.

Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight. Psalm 119:143 (ESV)

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word. Psalm 119:114 (ESV)

When life falls apart, where do you turn? The words of God are like a shield that protects us. When life falls apart, we find hope in God's Word. God's Word holds us together when everything else in life is falling apart. Let me have a little show of hands. How many of us here have been through a time in life where our world fell apart? How many of you found that in that time God's Word was like duct tape that God used to hold you together?

Reading Moby Dick just doesn't provide the same level of comfort as God's Word. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to comfort our hearts. No other words on the planet can do this.

It is our joy.

Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. Psalm 119:111 (ESV)

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Psalm 119:103 (ESV)

If you want to be a joy-filled person, the best way to find joy is to put yourself in the Word of God. The Word of God tells us about God's great grace to us through Jesus. The Word of God is the only place that tells us about God's great plans for us in eternity to be the most blessed beings in the universe for all eternity through Jesus. The more we fill our hearts with the truth of God's love and faithfulness and the more we understand his good plans for us through Christ, how can we not become men and women bubbling with joy?

Let me summarize. This Psalm tells us the Word of God is eternal — it is the only book with words that are always relevant and have no expiration date. The Bible is of infinite value — it is better to be a poor person with a Bible than a billionaire without one. The Bible is the only no-spin zone. It is the ultimate source of truth. The Bible is joy. The Bible has the message of God's incredible goodness to us through Jesus Christ that we don't deserve.

Let's move from seeing what this Word is, to seeing what God's Word does in our lives.

We love the Bible because of what the Word of God does.

It brings happiness.

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... Psalm 119:1–2 (ESV)

Blessed in this verse means happy. Our happiness is tied to how we value the Word of God. The devil wants us to think the opposite is true. The devil wants us to think God desires to ruin our lives and his Word is boring. In reality, the

more we know the Word of God and obey the Word of God, the happier we will be. If want you to be happy, you don't need a Cadillac Escalade. The best thing I can do for you to help with your happiness is to get you into God's Word. By knowing and obeying God's Word, we will always live happier lives. What God says is sinful is not just sinful but it is contrary to the way God designed the world to work so it will always lead to heartache and pain.

It brings cleansing from sin.

While there are verses in Psalm 119 that talk about this, such as verse 32 and 45, I think a better verse to illustrate the power of the Word of God to cleanse us from the effects of sin both eternally and temporarily comes from Ephesians 5:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.
Ephesians 5:25–27 (ESV)

Just as a husband is to go out of his way to love his wife and give himself up for her making her all she can be, in the same way Christ takes his bride, which is the church—that is us—and he makes us all we should be, and he cleanses us from sin by the Word of God. If you are struggling with holiness, if you are struggling with addictions, immerse yourself into the Word of God. Read it in the morning. Read it in the evening. God will use his Word to cleanse your heart and reformat your thought patterns and give you a desire toward holiness. I cannot commend to you enough the power of God's Word to cleanse us from sinful addictions, thoughts and ways. When seasoned Christians find themselves

drifting back toward old sinful habits, it is usually a sign they have walked away from spending regular time in the Word of God.

It brings life and success.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.
Psalm 119:9 (ESV)

May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame!
Psalm 119:80 (ESV)

Success in life comes from loving and obeying the Word of God. I am not saying we won't have trials. I am simply saying that if we know the Word of God and obey the Word of God, it leads us on a path of success in life. It is always profitable to love and obey God's Word.

In particular, there is the issue of young men. Who are young men? In my mind they are men from the age of 15 to 50. What happens is as you mature, you end up with the weight of more and more responsibility on your shoulders. First, it is college and you have to perform academically on your own. Next, you marry a wife and she is looking to you for leadership in your home. Then you face increasing responsibilities at work as you rise in your career. Soon there is a host of children in your home. Now you are providing for a wife and children, and many people at work are looking to you for leadership.

As those responsibilities rise, so do the temptations for disaster. There is workaholicism, greed, temptations with the opposite sex. The problem is if you make a mess of your life at this stage you take down many more people than just yourself. You hurt a wife; you wound your children; your job takes a beating.

How can young men handle the pressures of life successfully? By keeping their fingers in this book every day. I have never heard of a man that destroyed

his marriage and career while he spent daily time in the Bible. It just doesn't happen. Men die for a lack of God's Word, not from too much of God's Word. The path to life and success is found in this book.

It gives guidance for life's decisions.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105 (ESV)

We live in a complicated world filled with options. Which college should we attend? How should we spend our money? How much time should I put into work and how much time into family? Many of the decisions in life are hard. God's Word is like a flashlight. As we spend time in God's Word, God uses his Word to help us see situations clearly so we can understand them and make better decisions.

A few days ago I was driving between Sibley and Lake Park coming home from Rock Rapids. There are no street lights and in that area there are even no lights from homesteads on the side of the road. It is pitch black. All I had was my headlights. What would have happened if my lights went out? It would have only been a matter of moments until my life turned into disaster. If I would have been able to get the car safely stopped, it would have been almost impossible to make progress because I couldn't see anything. If you think it is crazy to drive at night between Sibley and Lake Park without your headlights, it is even crazier to live life without the illumination of God's Word so you can think clearly about decisions in life.

It gives peace in place of anxiety.

Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. Psalm 119:165 (ESV)

If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. Psalm 119:92 (ESV)

Life is filled with stress. How do we handle the stress of life? The Bible tells us to read it. Study God's Word and find peace in place of anxiety. How many here this morning have faced times of extreme stress and anxiety? In those times of stress, we can go to God's Word. When we spend time in it we will find an overwhelming sense of peace come over us because God's Word reminds us that our savior has everything under control. We may not avoid the trial but we know that God will carry us through the trial.

I honestly do not know how people go through life without the Word of God replacing anxiety in life with peace from God.

Look at some of the things the Word of God does for us. It brings happiness; it brings freedom from the power of sin; it holds the keys to life and success — especially for young men; it illuminates our paths so we can make good decisions in life; it gives us wisdom; it gives us peace in place of anxiety.

If you think about it, because of the Bible's unique identity among all books and because of what the Bible promises to do to us when we take it into our lives, it would be foolish to not immerse ourselves in this book. It would be foolish to content ourselves with only 40 minutes in this book on the weekends.

This is why the Bible tells us how we are to treat this book. How do we keep our finger in the text?

How should I treat my Bible?

Study it.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. Psalm 119:15 (ESV)

My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. Psalm 119:148 (ESV)

I want us to notice these verses do not tell us to just read the Bible. It tells us to meditate on the Bible. Meditate means to think about something. It means to roll something around in your mind. We call that studying. Some of us read the Bible like we read the newspaper. We skim it. The Bible tells us to treat it much more seriously than the newspaper. Studying something means we take a highlighter and mark things we don't want to forget. It means we make notes in the margins. It means we take a notebook and take the time to copy down a Bible verse that is important to us.

You don't need to do what I do but the way I study the Bible is I use a program called Logos. My Bible and my books in Logos are filled with highlights and margin notes. I also have an app called Day One where I write down my Bible study notes. Other people use paper journals. That is good too. The key is we don't skim the Bible, we meditate on the Bible.

Obey it.

I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments. Psalm 119:60 (ESV)

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Psalm 119:33 (ESV)

I like the way David talked about this. He didn't tell God he should obey his Bible. Instead he promised to obey his Bible. In fact he asked God to teach him more of the Bible so he could go out of his way to obey more of the Bible. Obedience to whatever God said was an unquestioned response in David's mind because God's words are eternal truth.

The problem is many of us know God's Word but we struggle to obey God's Word. The reason we struggle to obey is because we have too low a view of the Bible. We see the Bible as the suggestion of men, not God's eternal words. If we understand that God's Word is truth and it always leads to blessing, it is a trap of Satan to think anything but obedience is the right response.

Memorize it.

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. Psalm 119:16 (ESV)

The memorization of God's Word is incredibly important for life. If we have committed God's Word to heart, the Holy Spirit will bring memorized Bible verses back to our minds at the appropriate time so we will remember them when we need them. This is one of the reasons I love AWANA. At a young age our kids are already committing God's Word to their hearts. The Holy Spirit will take those verses and bring them to the minds of those children for the rest of their lives.

Enjoy it.

...for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. Psalm 119:47 (ESV)

I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. Psalm 119:162 (ESV)

When we go to God's Word, don't let yourself be tricked into reading the Word out of mere obligation. I admit that sometimes Bible reading is less than thrilling. God commands us to enjoy our Bible. Ask God for help enjoying your Bible.

Don't just tell yourself to read God's Word because you have to. Read God's Word because you want to! Don't just read the Bible out of duty but read it out of delight. Enjoy this book.

Sing it.

Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning. Psalm 119:54 (ESV)

My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right. Psalm 119:172 (ESV)

The Bible tells us the music that goes through our heads should ideally be the Word of God put to music. That doesn't mean the only thing we can sing are the Words of God put to music. It means one of the best things we can sing are the words of God put to music. Music helps us memorize. Music gives shape to the joys and the sorrows of our hearts. God's Word put to music penetrates our lives in a special way.

Listen to Christian radio. Listen to Christian bands. Listen to artists that take the Word of God and put the Bible to music, because that will help the Word of God penetrate your soul.

Ask God to help us understand it.

This may be one of the best pieces of insight for many of us. Repeatedly throughout this Psalm David asked God for help to understand his Bible. I know that makes many of us feel better because we also have trouble understanding the Bible. David asked God's Holy Spirit to open up his understanding so he could understand his Bible. Each of us needs to ask God for help when we read and study the Bible. Reading the Bible is not just a cognitive exercise. It is a spiritual exercise where God show us things in his Word we never noticed before.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Psalm 119:18 (ESV)

Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Psalm 119:34 (ESV)

What should I do?

Psalm 119 is a shock-and-awe campaign of 176 penetrating verses on why we should love this book and how to weave this book into the fabric of our lives.

This is why we keep our finger in the text at CrossWinds. We have a very high view of the Bible because the Bible has a very high view of itself. It is also why in 2017 I am challenging each of us to keep our finger in this book on our own.

This year we are putting out the “Take Up and Read” challenge. If we read one chapter of the New Testament a day Monday through Friday, we can cover the entire New Testament in a year and it gives the weekend to catch up if we fall behind. This morning, will you accept the “Take Up and Read” challenge and join your church family in reading through the New Testament this year?

After we think about what the Bible is, what the Bible does and how the Bible tells us we are to take it into our lives, it seems foolish to think 40 minutes of Bible reading on the weekend is all the blessing we would like to derive from this book.

Will you join me in reading the New Testament this year? Will you take up and read this book?



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)