

To Read or Not To Read - Psalm 119:129-136

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[0 : 0 0] lives. And this morning, Connor will be preaching, and I'm just looking down at his title, or you have it up there, to read or to not read from Psalm 119. So I'll just pray for Connor just before he comes up and share God's word with us. Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you have given it to us. I thank you that we can trust your word, that we know that it's inspired by you. We read about it in scripture of how you caused it to be written by man, and yet it's the very words of God. We thank you that your word is inerrant, that it's sufficient for us for salvation. It is clear to us. It shows us the path of salvation. We thank you that we need not fear of further revelation, for what you have given us is what we need. We thank you that over the years you've raised up so many teachers of your word to teach us, to bring your word, to explain it, to encourage us, to discipline us, to correct us, to rebuke us. We do thank you for Connor, for his willingness to sit down, be a student under your word, to actually prepare, to read, to apply it to himself. I thank you that his desire is to be a workman approved unto you, not to be ashamed, but instead to correctly handle the word of truth.

I pray that as he comes up, that our hearts will be open to learning, that whatever preconceived notions or misunderstandings that we have would just fall away as we come under your word, as we hear it once again and desire to apply it, to put into practice, not to be people who merely listen to your word and not do it. For Connor, as he comes up, I pray that as he preaches, that he would himself be learning and growing, that he would be clear, allowing your spirit to work through him as he brings your word. I pray indeed that the words that come from his mouth would be acceptable to you, that the meditations of our heart would be acceptable to you, our Lord, our God, our strength, our rock.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you, Connor. Thanks very much, Jonathan and Alex as well, for reading from the Bible. It's great to hear the Bible, you know, every now and then in church or something. But I think we all know it isn't really relevant to our day-to-day lives. I mean, how could it be? It's thousands of years old.

The people who wrote it, they've no idea what it's like to be alive in the 21st century. Also, the Lord knows how busy we are. He knows we're good people and that if we could, we would read the Bible. I know some of you have grown up in Sunday schools, Christian kids clubs, Christian camps. You know the stories. We don't need to be constantly reading them again and again.

I have three kids. The most important thing in my life at the moment is raising my kids right. My day is filled with work, taking care of the kids, catching up with everyone on Facebook, watching the World Cup a couple of weeks ago. The Lord understands I can't possibly read the Bible every day. He knows, just like we do, that living out the morals in the Bible is more important than actually reading it. These are just some of the excuses that we fool ourselves into believing are acceptable for not reading our Bible every day. We constantly put it off with a, I'll catch up tomorrow. While evangelicals are a bit better, the figures are still shocking.

[4 : 0 2] A recent study in America discovered that only 49% of evangelicals read their Bible every day. 39% of regular churchgoers do the same. 36% of Protestants and only 17% of Catholics.

These are all professing Christians. While these figures are American figures, I've absolutely no proof of this next statement. I'd be fairly confident that those figures are similar for Europe, similar for Ireland, similar for Carragalline. Now you may be thinking, but Connor, why are you getting so caught up in this? You're not saved by reading the Bible. Well, hopefully by the end of the sermon, maybe in three hours time or so, I'll have you so sick of me that you'll just agree with me.

No, no. Hopefully you'll see that in fact the Bible is what saves you. Reading the Bible is a command for all believers. It's a need for all believers. It should be a love for all believers. It's a benefit to all believers and it should be a response to all that God has done for all believers.

Well, if you were taken in by my initial spiel disregarding the importance of the Bible, then I'm very happy to disappoint you because we are indeed going to be reading from God's Word before we go any further. And to make you all feel guilty about not reading the Bible enough, the passage we're going to read from is Psalm 119, which is the longest in the whole Bible.

If you have the Red Church Bible, it's on page 621. We're only going to be looking at a few verses now. We won't read it all the way through. We'll be flicking through different verses though as we go along. So it's Psalm 119 and we're going to start at verse 129. And as I said, page 621 in the Red Church Bibles.

[6 : 02] Your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words gives light. It gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

Turn to me and have mercy on me as you always do to those who love your name. Direct my footsteps according to your word. Let no sin rule over me. Redeem me from human oppression that I may obey your precepts. Make your face shine on your servant and teach me your decrees. Streams of tears flow from my eyes for your law is not obeyed. Firstly, we should be reading our Bible every day because it's a command and it contains God's commands. If you say it's more important to live it, how do you ensure you're living it if you don't read it? Verse 129, your statutes are wonderful, therefore I obey them. It's not a bunch of rules or commands designed to infuriate us. They're wonderful because they come from a wonderful God who loves us and wants what's best for us. Verse 134, redeem me from human oppression that I may obey your precepts. What does it say? Why does the psalmist need redemption? That I may obey your precepts. A precept is something that God has appointed to be done. It's a command from the one true God. The psalmist wants relief from his enemies simply so he can continue to obey God's commands.

We're commanded to read the Bible. Verse 130, the unfolding of your words gives light. It gives understanding to the simple. Now I'm not suggesting you guys are simple. I'm sure you can remember what you've read and been taught, but it's the unfolding of God's words that gives light. It's only as we read it, study it, meditate on it, and do it all over again that we will fully appreciate the glorious leading light that the words contain. Before I started preparing this sermon, I knew that Psalm 119 told of the necessity and the beauty of the word of God, but as I've studied it and meditated on it again, I've been hit with the realization that I don't love it as the psalmist does. I don't long for it like we see in the fantastic verse 131. I open my mouth and pant longing for your commands. I should be gasping for the word of God every morning after being eight hours without it. I should be longing for it more than my breakfast. As Jonathan read earlier, it says in Deuteronomy 8, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Your daily Bible intake is more important than your daily food intake. What a great verse that is. I open my mouth and pant. This is something the psalmist needs in order to get through the next few hours. Without God's commands, the psalmist will get no satisfaction. He needs it like he needs water to survive. Thankfully, we live in a society where the Bible is freely available. Alex was praying earlier, freely available in our language and many other languages. Most of us, I guess, have numerous in our homes, but sometimes that can lead to taking it for granted. Do we long for it? Do we pant when we don't read it for too long? The Bible is in need for life. It's not simply something God commands us to do because it's good for us. We need it.

Fit back to verse 105. It's on the previous page, if you're looking at the church Bibles. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. The picture set in the dead of night, pitch black, not like the summer nights where we're experiencing at the moment, but the winter nights. You can't see two feet in front of you. The only lights are the stars in the sky. We need God's word like we need light in that situation. Once we get our hands on some light, then we follow where it leads. We're not going to shine the light behind us and walk forwards. We shine the light where we need to go. We follow it. When we take in God's word every day, we allow it to shape our path. We allow it to direct our steps where we need to go, and we follow it. The psalmist clearly knows that he needs God's word, but why?

What has led to this conviction that God's word is so important in this life, that it's actually something he needs to survive? First thing in verse 130, we read that it gives understanding.

[11 : 19] This understanding is talking about understanding of salvation and eternal life. Reading and understanding the Bible is absolutely necessary to be saved and to live forever with our loving God.

We see from verse 133 as well that it's essential in order to let no sin rule over me. The only way we can be saved from the pain of this life, the only way we can be saved from eventual death, the only way we can be saved to fill the longing of our hearts is to let no sin rule over us by reading, understanding, and following God's word. The only way we can receive God's favor, the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, is to put our faith in Jesus Christ, the God-man that's pointed to throughout the whole Bible. We can see him clearly in this psalm written a thousand years before he came to earth as a baby. The verses we're looking at are talking about God's word and commands and decrees. One of the songs we were singing earlier was, You're the Word of God the Father. That's from John chapter 1. We learn that God's word is in fact Jesus, the word who is with God and is God.

Jesus is in need for forgiveness of all the wrongdoing and to fill our lives instead with perfection when God looks down on us. We find Jesus through the Bible, which is how God has revealed himself. Our very lives depend on reading God's word regularly. We need to follow what we read. We need to follow the lamp that's guiding our path. We need to be doers, yes, but in order to do, we need to read and know what to do. Up until now, it seems that, yes, we should read the Bible every day because God commands it and we need it, but maybe we do it because we have to. However, it's not a requirement that should be forced on us. Verse 131 again, I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.

There's no reason why we shouldn't love obeying this particular command. Some of God's commands we may struggle with. Some of them I obey simply because I know it's what God wants and I know he knows what's what's best for me, but this command to read the Bible every day is a love and an enjoyable task.

Back a bit from our passage in verse 127. I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold. Do we come to God's word with the feeling that we would rather have this in our hands than all the money in the world? Do we sit down in the quietness and read it, knowing that what we have is invaluable and eternal? Do we open up its pages expecting to find something precious in the words? God is so gracious. I take his word for granted way too often.

[14:35] Most days I don't come to it cherishing it more than gold and knowing it's invaluable or expecting something precious. Yet when I read it, no matter how I take it for granted, the Lord will regularly bless me from its pages. Whether we accept it or not, it is God's word and we can't help but be changed by it when we read it. But think of how much more we could take from it if we came to it with the right attitude. Regularly we go chasing after the busyness of our lives. We get caught up in it all.

When really our lives are dependent on the thing that we are neglecting. The most valuable possession we have, we ignore. Back a bit again in verse 97.

Oh, how I love your law. You see the exclamation mark at the end? See the exclamation of pure joy at the start? Oh, how I love your law. Words aren't enough to describe the psalmist's love and joy at being able to read God's law. I recently attended a Billy Joel concert. As he hobbled on stage, there were screams and roars from close to 100,000 people. Some people were legging it up the front, completely losing their minds over seeing someone they've loved for decades. It's clear human beings have passion. It's clear we feel excitement and love and joy. Do we come to God's word with that zeal, with that passion?

Obviously, I'm not talking about losing our minds in the house every morning while everyone else is asleep. But we can still feel excitement. We can still get butterflies in our stomach if we come to the Bible correctly. Before we start, if we think upon how God loves us, if we think upon the sacrifice that Jesus has made for us, if we think upon the whips and the nails that he bore so that we wouldn't have to, if we think upon the amazing concerts we're going to be part of in heaven if we put our faith in Christ now, how can we not have butterflies knowing that this is the person that we're about to hear from, the person who loves us more than anyone else ever can.

Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long. Meditation here, it's not a scan read over breakfast with your daily bread teaching notes. Meditation is deliberately taking time out of your day to sit down with God's word and commune with him. Bask in the glory of what's being said. Work your butt off to ensure your understanding is. Talk to God about it and come up with ideas how you can put it into practice. If you put the efforts into your Bible reading, it will become an enjoyment as you learn more and more of God's love and grace. However, if you're still not convinced that daily Bible reading is the way to go, listen to the amazing benefits that the Lord promises from it. I'm just

going to read through a few verses from Psalm 119. There's no need to follow along. I kind of jump around a bit, but hopefully you'll see what I mean by benefits. Verse 28, my soul is weary with sorrow.

[18:15] Strengthen me according to your word. When we're feeling down and weary, turn to God's word, the only source of true spiritual strength. When this life and the busyness of it is becoming too much, set aside time to read and study God's word, and all of a sudden God promises he will provide the strength to carry on. Verse 165, it speaks of the great peace that those who love the Bible have. Weariness and stress fade to the background when we're reminded of what we have in Jesus. Verse 98, your commands make me wiser than my enemies. If you're daily putting God's word into your hearts, you'll become wiser, and with those difficult decisions that we all have to make, it'll become easier to know the right path. Verse 132 in our passage that we were looking at, turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name. All of us, because of our sin and wrongdoing, we deserve punishment. We deserve death. But if we love God's name, if we love reading and obeying his word, he will give us unmerited grace and mercy. Verse 173, may your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. Because the psalmist chose to give God's word its due respect, he's confident that God's hand is always ready to help him out. If we put Jesus and his teachings first in our lives, God promises to strengthen us in our weariness, give us peace from our stress, fill us with wisdom, grant us mercy when we don't deserve it, and help us with any struggles life may present.

And that's only from bits and pieces of Psalm 119. The Bible is full of amazing promises from God, if we read and obey his word. A final argument then for reading your Bible every single day is, if you were truly saved from your sin, if you truly recognize the position you were in before you accepted Jesus' sacrifice in your life, then your response should be all that we have discussed so far. We should want to obey God's commands. We should recognize our need to get God's word into our lives every day. We should love to read his precepts and we should be striving for the benefits we're promised. Verse 134, redeem me from human oppression, that I may obey your precepts. The psalmist wants those people that are traumatizing him to stop, obviously, but why? So that he may obey God's words. It's the most important thing in his life. Because he has recognized God's mercy, reading and obeying the Bible take priority in his daily life. When we truly understand our complete helplessness without Jesus, we can identify with verse 136, streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

These are obviously tears of sorrow for those that are perishing, but they're also tears of anger, anger that God's laws are not being followed, anger at the state the world is in. As a response, we should harness that righteous anger and sorrow and never take for granted the Bible which provides that salvation. The very words of God written down for all generations to be a blessing to the whole world as God promised Abraham way back. Jesus was the answer to this promise of salvation, this promise of hope. And through the Bible, we find this hope. This is how God has chosen to reveal himself and his salvation plan through his son. We need this in our lives every single day if we're going to persevere through this life to the very end. And hopefully when we meet our Savior, he'll say, well done, good and faithful servant.

When I began preparing this sermon, my initial aim was to go through a whole Bible overview of the Bible, basically to encourage us all to read our Bibles every day by going through different metaphors that the Bible uses to describe itself. So we've seen one of them in Psalm 119, a light, things like a double-edged sword in Hebrews, etc, etc. But then I read through Psalm 119. That was more than enough.

[23:14] Please, during this week, take some time to read through the Psalm. And God promises you, you will be filled with a renewed appreciation and love for God's laws and commands. Laws and commands that provide freedom. Laws and commands that we need to survive this life and to enter into eternal life. Laws and commands that we will love if we put the effort into reading and understanding.

Laws and commands that we should obey as a response to what Jesus did for us on the cross, dying and suffering the death that we deserve. I've already mentioned that I fail regularly in this. I don't love the Bible as I ought. I take God's life-giving word for granted more often than not probably. But the same grace that took away all our sin through death and suffering is the same grace that's still active in the world today through the Holy Spirit. Turn in repentance to God for not valuing his word and his sacrifice as you should. Renew your commitment or make that

commitment afresh to him. And if it's genuine, he will already have forgotten it. What a God we serve.

In conclusion, let me just say, if you're a reader, you have no excuse. The Bible is a really exciting book as well as the small point of holding the keys to eternal life and salvation. If you're not a reader, well then you're off the hook. No, you have no excuse. There's audio available for free online or else you can pay for it on mp3 or on a CD. The effort you put in will be worth it. Let me leave you with this verse as a challenge for the week ahead and then Jonathan will close for us. Verse 131, Father God, thank you for your word. Thank you for blessing us with it and that we can read it anytime we wish. I pray for each and every person here, myself included, that we would not take that word for granted, that we would recognize it for what it is, the very words of the one true God and that it's how you have chosen to reveal yourself, how you've chosen to reveal your salvation plan and we shouldn't go a day without it. I pray for each one of us as we go through the week ahead, whatever time we have, whether it's we start off our day right in the morning or whether we finish with it before we go to bed, but that we would be getting the word into us and that we would spend time studying it, meditating on it and then following it wherever it leads. In Jesus name, amen.

Thank you, Conor. Thank you. What a challenge to us. Even day by day as we think about it.