

# The Word-Centered Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] As Arnie mentioned, my name is Luke, and I'm an elder at Emmaus Road Church here in Appleton. I'm also a seminary student at Reformed Theological Seminary.

I think this is my fourth or fifth time being with you, and it's a pleasure to be here again, and it's an honor to bring God's word to you. Well, we spent this summer at Emmaus Road Church going through some of the Psalms, and I chose to preach on Psalm 119.

And if you know anything about Psalm 119, you probably know that it is long. It is 176 verses long, but don't worry, we're only looking at the first 24 verses today.

You might also know that this psalm is about God's law. Now, we don't know who wrote this psalm or when, but we do know that it was written about the Torah, which is the first five books of the Bible.

And you'll see different words used throughout this psalm that refer to the Torah. Words like law or testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and so on.

[ 1 : 11 ] And there might be little nuances to the different meanings of those words, but when you see those words, know that they are not just about the law, the commandments of God.

They apply to all of God's word. Something that you might not know about Psalm 119, something I never realized before studying it, is that it has elements of a lament throughout.

And we're going to see some of that today, talking about how God's word sustains the psalmist, even through the midst of suffering. So keeping that in mind, let's read Psalm 119.

Hear God's word. 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, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways.

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh, that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

[ 2 : 21 ] I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes. Do not utterly forsake me. 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.

Blessed are you, O Lord. Teach me your statutes. With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes. I will not forget your word. Deal bountifully with your servant that I may live and keep your word.

Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I am a sojourner on the earth. Hide not your commandments from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times.

[ 3 : 25 ] You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones who wander from your commandments. Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

Your testimonies are my delight. They are my counselors. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you have revealed yourself to us in your word.

And we pray that we would treasure it as the true and powerful gift that it is. As we receive your word this morning, use it to teach us, to convict us, and to transform us from one degree of glory to another into the image of your most holy son.

It's in his name that we pray. Amen. Well, one summer, when I was probably eight or nine years old, I went with my best friend and his family on a camping trip.

And when we got to the campground, me and my friend decided to go exploring on our bikes for a bit. But rather than biking along the main roads of the campground, we found this little narrow trail right next to our campsite that went into the thick of the forest.

[ 4 : 43 ] Now, I don't remember why, but my friend decided to go explore down this trail first. So he took off down the path, and he disappeared out of my sight for a few seconds before returning into our campsite.

And so then it was my turn to go down the trail. And so I go, and I start biking, and biking, and biking. But all I was finding was more trees and more trails.

Finally, I emerged from the woods onto one of the main roads of the campground. But our campsite was nowhere to be found. I started biking down the road, trying to get my bearings.

But I soon realized that I was lost. I biked around for five or ten minutes, trying to figure out what to do. Remember, I was eight or nine years old. I didn't know what to do. And suddenly, I ran into my best friend's older brother, who was out on a bike ride himself.

And he led me safely back to our campsite. And when I got back there, I asked my friend what went wrong. Why did this path take him back to the campsite and me deep into the woods?

[ 5 : 54 ] Well, he explained that there was this little trail that veered off of the path and right back to our campsite. Would have been nice if he had told me that.

Well, God has told us. God has shown us his path. And he has promised to sustain us to the end. And one of the main ways that he sustains us on his path is through his word.

It's through his word that we commune with him. That we know him. That we deepen our relationship with him. His word is the path.

Not just to truth about God. But to God himself. This psalm is titled, Your Word is a Lamp to My Feet.

Which comes from verse 105 of this psalm. Which says, Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. It's a light for your path to him.

[ 7 : 04 ] Let me ask you. Are you on his path? Let me ask it a different way. What's your relationship like with God's word?

Are you actually lighting your path with his word? If not, you're going to get lost. Like me, you're going to end up on some other path leading to somewhere you never meant to go.

Maybe you're already lost in a season of sinful habits and disregard for God's word. Maybe you haven't read your Bible in months.

I'm not here to try to make you feel guilty for that. I'm here to warn you. That if God's word isn't central to your life, You are heading for danger.

This is a fallen world. It is dark and filled with danger for your soul. But God's word is light. And if you're not nurturing your relationship with God by immersing yourself in his word, You're going to find yourself on the wrong path.

[ 8 : 19 ] In order to walk on God's path, We need to seek him with our whole heart. And as we're going to see in our passage today, Seeking God with our whole heart has benefits.

It brings blessings. It brings purity. And it brings comfort. So first, seeking God with our whole heart brings blessings.

Verses 1 through 3 say, Blessed are those whose way is blameless, Who walk in the way of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, Who seek him with their whole heart, Who also do no wrong, But walk in his ways.

These first three verses are kind of an intro to the entire chapter. And when I read that, Something stands out to me. Those who are blameless, Who seek God with their whole heart, Who do no wrong.

Who is that? We know that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, And that mankind is by nature sinful.

[ 9 : 31 ] So what does it mean to be blameless? To do no wrong? What it doesn't mean is someone who never sins. Rather, it's speaking of someone whose character is so overwhelmingly defined by their devotion to God.

Someone who isn't double-minded. Someone who is the same person at home, As they are at the office, As they are at church, Who has no hidden life, No hidden sin, But that reflects Christ in all that they do.

Most of us can probably think of someone like that. Unfortunately, that probably doesn't describe many of us. Many of us, all of us at times, Don't seek God with our whole heart.

Instead, our affections, Our desires, Our longings are for things of this world. We idolize the creation, Rather than worshiping the creator.

But this passage is saying, It's through the pursuit of God, And walking in his ways, That true blessing comes. Now those blessings, Might not look like what we want.

[10:51] This is not, The prosperity gospel. Obeying God does not lead to health and wealth. God is not the means, To worldly prosperity.

But he is the means, To spiritual prosperity. And we see, That that kind of spiritual prosperity, That deep fellowship with God, And the spiritual blessings that come with it.

That is what the psalmist wants. Verse 5, Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes. Then I shall not be put to shame, Having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

The psalmist longs for the peace of a clear conscience, And a heart that rejoices in obedience to God. Verse 7, I will praise you with an upright heart, When I learn your righteous rules.

See, God's rules reveal to us his character. God's laws were not just chosen arbitrarily by God, But rather they are a revelation of his very nature.

[12:05] You know, We sometimes, When we think about the law, We think of it as a burden. But it's actually an opportunity for us, To taste the goodness of God.

Verse 8, I will keep your statutes. Do not utterly forsake me. The psalmist here pledges himself to faithfulness in God's laws, But he knows that he will inevitably fail to do so perfectly.

And so he pleads with God to remain with him, Even when he fails to seek him with his whole heart. Imagine someone who wants to lose weight and get healthy.

So they start eating more vegetables. But they also keep eating fast food and ice cream. And then they're confused why their health is still terrible.

So you can't just add vegetables to an already unhealthy life And expect your health to improve. You need to completely change your priorities to get healthy. You have to be all in.

[13:15] And that's what the psalmist is getting at here. God's blessings come from being all in with God. So what does that look like?

What does it look like to seek God with your whole heart? Does it mean having quiet time in the morning? Does it mean doing family worship at your home?

Does it mean giving up certain things that keep you from God, Like alcohol or screen time or time-sucking hobbies? Maybe.

But what it definitely means, as we've seen in these verses, Is obedience to God. Being blameless in life. Walking in the law of the Lord.

Keeping his testimonies. Doing no wrong. Fixing our eyes on his commandments. What did Jesus say in John 14? He said, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

[14:21] If you love me, you will keep my commandments. See, our love for the Lord is reflected in our obedience to him. He doesn't earn his love.

It's a result of our love for him. Imagine a husband who says that he loves his wife more than anything in the world.

And yet, he cheats on her regularly. And only spends an hour or so with her every week. He wants our whole heart. He wants our whole heart. He wants our whole heart.

That is not the kind of relationship that God wants with us. He wants our whole heart. And he is faithful to bless those who seek him with their whole heart.

Seeking God with your whole heart brings his blessings. It also brings purity. Verse 9 says, How can a young man keep his way pure?

[15:24] By guarding it according to your word. The NIV translates it as by living according to your word. Choosing the path of purity means living according to God's word.

See, God has revealed to us in his word what we are to believe about God and what duty God requires of us. It's all there. It's all there in the Bible.

God has given us the tools that we need to live in purity. To keep our way pure. Verses 11 through 13 say, I have stored up your word in my heart.

Teach me your statutes. With my lips, I declare all the rules of your mouth. And get the image of God's word engaging our whole selves, our hearts, our minds, our words.



Jesus said, man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Man shall live by the word of God.

Seeking God with your whole heart brings blessings, and it brings purity. It also brings comfort. In verses 17 and 18, the psalmist acknowledges what we were just talking about, that we can't follow in God's ways by just sheer force of will.

God has to do the work within us to transform us and to conform us into his image. Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word.

Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. See, the psalmist, he doesn't just magically one day decide that he loves God's law.

[ 22 : 48 ] He pleads with God. He knows that he needs God to create that love. So he asks for it in prayer. In verses 19 through 24, we get this sense that the psalmist is going through a difficult season of life.

This is where those elements of a lament come in. He says, I am a sojourner on the earth. Take away from me scorn and contempt. Princes plot against me.

Verse 22 especially gets at the heart of this stanza. It says, Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. The psalmist is crying out to God, basically saying, I've kept your commandments.

I've led a blameless life. Why am I suffering as the insolent, as one who wanders from your commandments, who you rebuke? Have mercy on me, God, instead.

We can all probably relate to that. We all, at one point or another, have asked, Why do the wicked prosper, while the innocent suffer?

[ 24 : 02 ] The Bible does speak to that question elsewhere, but not in this passage. That's not the point of this passage, to explain why bad things happen to good people.

The point here is that bad things do happen. But that God's word provides comfort. Verse 24, Your testimonies are my delight.

They are my counselors in times of trouble. This last summer, the family and I, we went and stayed at a cabin in the north woods of Wisconsin.

It's a four-hour drive north, and if you've ever driven up into the north woods, you know that it is a whole other world, up there. There aren't a whole lot of people. And the back roads up there, can seem kind of dubious, like, where is this winding road taking me?

It's not that bad, though, because all of us have a GPS in our pockets these days, right? 20 years ago, I would probably be using MapQuest for a trip like that.

[ 25 : 15 ] Some of you might remember that, the old printed directions that told you each turn you're supposed to take. The problem with that, though, was if you missed your turn, or if a road was closed for construction or whatever, the rest of the directions were useless to you.

You were on your own. But with GPS, you don't have to worry about that. No matter where you end up, you know it's going to safely guide you along your way.

Even if you take a wrong turn, it will course-correct and still guide you the right way. That is the kind of comfort that we can have in God's word.

Even in the midst of trouble and suffering, we have God's word to see us through. We have his law to guide us into deeper communion with him, where we can experience joy in knowing that God does not utterly forsake us, but he is near to us.

Psalms 34 says, That God is near to the brokenhearted. See, in moments of suffering, it can feel like God has abandoned us.

[ 26 : 30 ] But in reality, he is near to us, offering us his comfort and guidance in his word. What do you do when you're suffering?

When your friend hurts you? When your marriage is struggling? When you hate your job? When the depression or the anxiety feel overwhelming?

How do you cope? I could talk about all the unhealthy ways we might try to cope through alcohol or gossip or whatever it might be, but there's another way that we try to cope with trials.

It's this thing that we do where we create this false narrative in our head. When something hard happens in our life, we often create this narrative where we are the protagonist, right?

Where we are the hero of the story who has been unjustly treated by a boss, by our spouse, maybe even by God. We create this narrative, and we replay it in our heads over and over, dwelling on the bitterness, fantasizing about revenge, playing ourselves up as victims.

[ 27 : 53 ] However you frame the narrative, it always seems to center on our own innocence, how we deserve better. Is that the narrative in Scripture?

The narrative in Scripture is that we all deserve hell. We are not the hero of the story. The hero of the story is Jesus.

The Word made flesh who humbled himself to suffer and die in our place. There is a very real sense in which Psalm 119 is not just about the Word on the pages of the Bible.

It's about the Word made flesh. It's about Jesus and the delight that we have in our union with Him. In the midst of trials, we are still united to Him.

So seek Him with your whole heart and enjoy His comfort. There's a book by C.S. Lewis called The Screwtape Letters.

[ 29 : 06 ] It's written from the point of view of this elder demon to a young, inexperienced demon. on how to corrupt this Christian that he'd been assigned to. And it's a fascinating read.

Many of you have probably read it. And the elder demon, his name is Screwtape, and he gives instruction on how to keep his Christian from seeking God with his whole heart. So he tells him to tempt the Christian with small sins, even though they're not as flashy as the more major sins.

And his rationale is this. He says, Remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the enemy, the enemy being God.

It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and out into the nothing. Indeed, the safest road to hell is the gradual one.

That's a strategy that many of us have probably fallen for. We tell ourselves, We're not as bad as that guy.

[ 30 : 19 ] Like the Pharisee in the temple who prays, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. Could it be that over time the small sins in your life have created a wedge between you and God that has gotten deeper and wider over the years until you've been driven to walking on your own path rather than God's?

Maybe you've become that Pharisee going through the motions of religion when what you really need to do is to beat your breast and say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

The good news of the gospel is that God looks upon you walking in your own path of sin and foolishness and rather than hating you for it, he invites you to return to the path of righteousness, to turn from your sin, to turn from your neglect of God's word and your obedience to him and instead to seek him with your whole heart.

He will receive you with open arms. You won't be sorry. There is blessing, there is purity, and there is comfort in him.

If you don't believe me, taste and see that he is good. Let's pray. God, we thank you that you are a God who loves us and wants us to walk with you.

[ 32 : 06 ] We pray that you would do the work in our hearts, that you would transform our desires, help us to hate our sin, to long not for the things of this world, but for deeper intimacy with you.

We need your help to seek you with our whole hearts. We are weak and you are strong. You are able to make our hearts new. So help us to walk in your ways and to enjoy the blessing, the purity, and comfort that comes with it.

It's in your son's holy name that we pray. Amen. Amen.