

Getting the Most Out of the Bible

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[0 : 00] The Bible is the most wonderful book in the world. It's the most wonderful book in the world because it doesn't just come from this world, written down by people with their own individual personalities. It comes from heaven, breathed out by God.

Jesus said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And these are the words of God which bring life to a dead human soul. Jesus also said, I have come that they may have life, and life more abundantly. How shall we have the abundant life to which Jesus refers? Through the words He has spoken in the Bible, God offers us life in Him. Now, the most important things we need to know in the Bible are clear. We are sinners in need of forgiveness, a new life. Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. Through faith in Jesus, we are forgiven and have eternal life. But just because these most important things are clearly understood, what we call the perspicuity of Scripture, and we find them, it doesn't mean that we find them easy to understand, nor how we may put them into practice in our daily lives.

So, several of our younger members have asked how we can get the most out of our Bibles, because the more we get out of our Bibles, the more abundant our life in Christ will be.

I want us to turn to this verse, Psalm 119, verse 97, with this aim of getting the most out of the most wonderful book of the Bible. Oh, how I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day. So, with the aim of helping us to get the most out of the Bible, we want to look at three things. First of all, defining the Bible, defining the law rather. Second, desiring the law, and thirdly, doing the law. So, defining the law, desiring the law, and doing the law. First of all, defining the law.

[2 : 29] Now, Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It's a poem dedicated to the Word of God. It's divided into 22 sections, each corresponding to a different letter in the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, beth, gibbeth, daleth, and so on. Throughout the psalm, the writer talks about the Word of God using many different terms, statutes, precepts, rules, testimonies, and more. As Christians, how do we deal with loving the law of God? Aren't we more interested in a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ than in rules? Isn't this what Jesus criticized the Pharisees for? The rigid adherence to rule rather than the heart of a relationship with God. Now, these are valid questions, but they reveal a misunderstanding about the laws of the Bible in the Christian life. Jesus said in John chapter 14 verse 15, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. We obey the laws of Jesus because we love Jesus.

Love for Jesus is the reason. Obedience to Jesus is the result. The law has many other functions, but as far as we're concerned, the law does three things. First of all, it points to our inability to please God by our good works and religious ceremonies because we will always fall short, according to the law of perfect obedience. Second, the law points to Jesus Christ as the only one who kept the law perfectly. And third, the law tells us how to live as Christians through faith in Jesus.

Having trusted in Jesus for our salvation, the law guides us into living in the fullness of the Christian hope. So, for all these reasons, we love God's law. It shows us our need of Jesus.

It shows us Jesus, and it shows us how to live like Jesus. And we'll come back to this in a few minutes. In this short section from verse 97 to 104, entitled Mame, which is a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, the writer presents us with different ways of talking about God's law. Commandment, testimonies, precepts, rules, word. The most important of these, as far as we're concerned, is in verse 103, word, word. The law of God, as spoken of in Psalm 119, is the word of God.

Indeed, we can say that the word of God is far bigger than, but no less than, the law of God. Even the first five books of the Bible, which we commonly call the law, are far more than rules.

[5 : 50] There are stories, there are songs, there are poems, there are geographical descriptions. But the most important thing is that the word of God always follows a pattern.

It tells us what God has done to rescue us, and then it tells us how we are to respond. The indicatives of God, the things God has done to save us, come before the imperatives of God, the things God tells us to do.

The most famous laws in the Bible, of course, are the Ten Commandments. But these imperatives, these commands, are founded upon what comes before. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Why then should we have no other gods before the Lord? Because He is the Lord God, who rescued us from the slavery of spiritual Egypt. All the way through the Bible, we see the same repeating pattern. What God has done for us comes first, then what God requires of us comes second.

God has brought us into relationship with Himself. Now we are to obey Him by keeping His rules. So this then is the definition of law for us. Because law is just another way of saying word, it's not just about the rules we are to obey. It is first and foremost about the relationship God has made with us. God has loved us and demonstrated His love for us by rescuing us from danger. Now He commands us to obey Him. In the Old Testament, God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt and then commanded them to obey the Ten Commandments along with many other civil and ceremonial laws. In the New Testament, God has rescued us from our sin and death through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross and now commands us to obey Him.

And so this writer here is saying, I love every aspect of how God miraculously saved His people from Egypt and then called them to devote themselves to Him. And for us, therefore, as we sing these words, oh how I love your law, we're thinking of the whole story of Jesus, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and we're thinking about how we can live in a way that pleases Him and is like Him.

[8 : 36] The law then is, it's not some cold legal document. It's the living Word of God. It is filling us with the joy of salvation and the peace of Christ. This is the law the writer loves, and this is why we too should love the law of God. Because without it, there would be no salvation for any of us, just the darkness and lostness of eternal life without God. But for we who believe, the Word of God is the poem of God's saving love for us in the cross of Christ. And for that reason, we love it. We love it. So, defining the law of God. Second, desiring the law of God. Desiring the law of God. The writer of the Psalm wants to emphasize his devotion to the Word of God, and he does so by saying, oh how I love your law. The Word of God is not merely provided with intellectual instruction, it affects his emotions. It shapes who he is, what he thinks, how he feels. The Bible is a living book.

It is inspired by the living God, and it's addressed to the living person, the whole person, mind and heart. The word love, as used by the writer here, is the same word to describe the love a man has for his wife, the love a mother has for her children. That's the affection with which the Christian loves the story of Jesus. He would no sooner ignore his wife than he would his Bible. He would no sooner neglect his children than his Bible. Why is the Word of God, the law of God, so precious to us? It's because I said in the first point, it's the world in which we find our relationship to God. And it gives us ultimate satisfaction and joy. The two reasons that we love the Bible are encapsulated in that word, your, or how I love your law. It's because the Bible, first of all, is yours, and then it's Christ's, and I want to come to that. The first reason we love the Word of God is because it's yours. It's God's law. When Katharine and I were dating, for those of you who don't know, I'm married to Katharine. She's there. I lived in Aberdeen, and she lived in London. Now, these were days before mobile phones, emails, and social media, and we still wrote letters. And I loved it when I'd come home from university to find the postman had delivered a letter, Postmark London, from Katharine. I'd open it up, careful not to rip the way she'd written my address on the envelope, and I'd sit in my chair, and I'd read over every word over and over again. Sometimes I'd smile, and sometimes I'd just playfully daydream because the paper would smell of her perfume. I loved those letters because I loved her.

Skip forward 25 years to last year, and you'll find me sitting in my study reading an old theology book, and I'm waiting reading glasses I bought from Poundstretcher for 69p because the print is so small, and it's such an old book, and I'm struggling to stay awake. And I throw the book down on the table, and I say, this is so boring. Then the convicting thought comes into my head. Boring? Boring? This book is describing the character and the work of my heavenly Father, the Father who loved me enough to send His Son to die as the sacrifice for my atonement. This book is describing the work and character of your heavenly Father who loves you. Pick up that old book from the desk, put these 69-pence reading glasses back on, and gladly take up reading from where I left off. Get the

idea?

The reason we love the Word of God is because we love the God whose Word it is. The book is where we learn to love God because it's through the written Word of God, Jesus.

[13:16] The Bible, we come to know the living Word of God, Jesus. But we love the book because we love God, its author. We cannot say we love God if we neglect His Word. We love the rules of God because we have a living relationship with God. How can we say we love another person as long as they don't speak to us? Oh, I love you, darling. Just don't say anything to me. Sure, it's through what they say to us that we both learn to love them and we grow in our love for them. Oh, how I love the law is the expression of a legalistic, cold-hearted Pharisee. Oh, how I love your law is the expression of a grace-filled, warm-hearted Christian. If we love God, we will love His Word. Here's where we live in this new world of grace and love, of intimate relationship with our Father, the power of the Spirit and the peace of

Christ. We love the Word of God because of whose Word it is, God's. But it's Christ's. It's Christ's. St. Augustine was a great African Christian, as well as writing many important books. He had a groundbreaking understanding of the book of Psalms. He viewed them as the words of Christ. He repeatedly used the Latin phrase of Jesus, which means, He, Jesus, the singer of Psalms. He, Jesus, the singer of Psalms. Jesus sang, 119 verse 97, and of Him alone were its words sincerely and absolutely true.

But not only are these the words Christ Himself sang, they're also a portrait of who Jesus was, the Christ who loved the law of God because He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength. In thought, word, and action, Jesus didn't just love the Word of God, He kept the Word of God. The Psalms are a word portrait of Jesus. So, for example, in verse 100 there, I understand more than the aged, than the elders, for I keep your precepts. I mean, how good is that a description of what happened in the temple when Jesus was 12 years old? I went up to the temple to speak with all the wise men of Judaism. I've got a framed portrait of my family on my desk. In the Bible, which I also have on my desk, I have a framed portrait of my Savior. Furthermore, not only are these the words Christ sang, and not only are they a word portrait of the Jesus we love, they're the very words of Christ. He sang the Psalms because He inspired the Psalms.

[16:32] These are His words, just as surely as the words Kathmer wrote to me in those love letters 30 years ago, were her words. I cannot say I love Kathmer if I ignore what she says to me, and I cannot say I love the Lord Jesus if I pay no regard to what He says in the Bible about Himself.

Not only so, but the Word of God tells us how through faith in Jesus Christ we are saved from sin and death. They tell us the story of Christ's obedient life, His atoning death, His victorious resurrection. Heeding and obeying the Word of Christ to believe in Him for salvation makes all the difference between eternal life and eternal death. The rope by which a drowning man is hoisted to safety will always be precious to Him. And in the same way, we love the Word of God which commands us to believe in Christ unto life. And then finally, the Word of God teaches us how we may live like Jesus, how we may live like Jesus. Many years ago, I asked a senior ministerial friend on the conservative side of the free church to give his testimony at a fellowship meeting in our flat in Edinburgh. And among many other things, he said to us all that to him, Jesus was His hero, His hero. Now, we all want to be like our heroes.

We want to be like Jesus. If the Bible teaches us who Jesus is, it also teaches us how we may be like Him in thought, in word, and action. So, you see, how I love your law is the ecstatic expression of a man in love with God and Christ.

If we love God, we will love His Word. What I'm saying is the motive behind our study of the Bible is the ultimate reason we will want to get the most out of the Bible. This is not a reference book. This is a portrait of our Savior.

This is the Word of our Heavenly Father. It is the love letter of God to us. If we get our attitude to the Bible right, we are nine-tenths of the way to getting the most out of it. Desiring. Then thirdly, and this is where it gets practical, it gets practical, doing the law, doing the law. The writer of the Psalm, he loves the Word of God because he loves the God whose Word it is. But he does not stop there. He continues by saying, it is my meditation all the day. It is my meditation all the day. The way to get the most out of our Bibles is by meditating. Now, we must be careful to define our terms. Today, meditation is spoken of in terms of emptying our minds and living in the moment. But biblical meditation is not about emptying one's mind.

[20 : 05] It is about filling one's mind with the words of Christ. Biblical meditation is not about emptying one's mind. It is about filling one's mind with the words of Christ. The word meditate in Hebrew meant to mutter under one's breath, to mutter under one's breath. It means to talk to oneself in a way that no one else can hear what we're saying. It may not even require us to move our lips. Some of us may be able to do it mentally, but it means to mutter under one's breath. Approaching the Bible as the Word of the God we love, this helps us to understand how practically we may get the most out of our Bibles by meditating.

It really is a lost art of Christian discipleship, but it's very much the difference between understanding and applying between head and heart knowledge. So, in the morning, we may read a verse of Scripture in our daily devotions. To get the most out of that verse or passage, we need to meditate upon it.

In fact, as David says, we're to meditate upon it all the day. It's not about sitting in a zen-like position for five minutes thinking about what this text means and how it applies to us. What it means is muttering it under our breaths all day. Muttering it under our breaths all day. So, we're muttering it under our breaths on the bus in the way into university in the morning. And we're muttering it under our breath to ourselves over coffee. And we're muttering it to ourselves on the way home on the bus. It's a whole day activity. Let me add one more thing before we get into the meat of how we should meditate. Namely, we should pray as we meditate. We're to pray continually that God would help us to understand the meaning of our text or the passage about which we are meditating, and that

God would help us to apply it to our lives. Perhaps a prayer like that in Psalm 119 verse 18, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Meditation upon the Word of God and prayer belong together. So, having said that, let me suggest a helpful way which I use to meditate upon the Bible. And it's taken from the Shorter Catechism, which I learned as a child and which many of you did as well, I'm sure. In question three, we are asked, what do the Scriptures principally teach?

[23 : 09] What do the Scriptures principally teach? And our answer, the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. What man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. So, of any text of Scripture muttering under one's breath to oneself on the bus or over coffee or whatever, ask yourself the question, what does this verse teach me about God? What does it teach me about God? Now, we've all got smartphones with notepads. So, as you prayerfully meditate, write down your thoughts on your phone. Does this text teach me about the holiness, the love, the power, the truth, the glory of God? What does it teach me about God?

But then secondly, ask yourself, what does this text teach me about what God requires of me? Or in other words, how I am to live as a Christian? What does this text teach me about how I am to live as a Christian? Again, write down the answer on your phone. Don't pretend you'll remember it, because you won't. The devil loves to make us forget things. Does this text teach me to repent of a sin I'm committing? Does it teach me to believe in a promise God has made to me? Does it teach me to pursue a new course of obedience to Him? Does it teach me to reach out to a non-Christian friend with the gospel? Does it give me comfort in my confusion? That's a really easy but effective method, which I use, of meditating all the day. So, when you see me walking about town and I'm going, it's not because I'm going mad. I already am mad. It's because I'm talking to myself.

Yeah, you know that. What does this text teach me about God and what He's done for me? What does this text teach me about what duties God requires of me? But if you need more questions to help you, let me suggest five, and I've had them written down on the overhead. Let me suggest the following five questions which we can ask of any text or passage of Scripture. And incidentally, when I'm preaching and I'm thinking of applications from this text to share with you, I tend to focus on an answer to one of these five questions. First, is there a sin for me to forsake in this passage? Is there a sin for me to forsake in this passage? Second, is there a promise that I can claim in this passage? Is there a promise I can claim in this passage? Third, is it an example for me to follow in this passage? Is it an example for me to follow in this passage? Fourth, is it a command for me to obey in this passage? And then fifth, is there anything here for me to be thankful for?

Is there anything here for me to be thankful for? So, let's take an example of these five questions being asked of this verse, Psalm 119, verse 97. Is it a sin for me to forsake? Yes, that of neglecting the Word of God. Is there a promise for me to claim? Yes, that in meditating upon the Word of God,

I will learn to love God more. Is it an example for me to follow? Yes, the Jesus who meditated upon the Word of God all day. Is it a command for me to obey? Yes, to meditate upon the Word of God. [27 : 25] Is there anything for me to be thankful for? Yes, I'm thankful for the Word of God who loves me and the Christ who gave Himself for me.

In my experience, just in my own, maybe there are older Christians here who can share their own experiences, and their own experiences are probably better than mine, but meditating upon the Word of God is the best way to get the most out of the Bible. We love the Word of God because we love the God whose Word it is, and we love Him because in Jesus Christ, He loved us first. This is how we read His love letter to us. This is how we read His fatherly Word to us, praying and meditating upon it all day.

To go back to the beginning, the more we do this, the more the life of Christ will grow in us, the more peace, hope, and joy we'll have in believing in Him, and the more we will mature as Christians.

And I'm happy, if anyone wants more help on this issue, sit down and go through it with you, and you can maybe contribute to my own practices. But as we close, I want to challenge those of us here who are not yet Christians. You do not yet love God because you do not know God. But if you knew God as He was, you would love Him. There is only one place you will ever get to know God, and that is through His Word, the Bible. When you get to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, everything else in life pales into insignificance beside His love, His grace, and the joy He brings.

So may I humbly suggest that you start where the Psalm writer starts, with the Word of God. Then you'll learn that the first and most important thing any of us must do now is to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Savior.