

The Word for Life

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, please grab a Bible, if you haven't already, and turn back to Psalm 119, page 610. This is our last in our mini-series over the month of January, looking at Psalms about God's Word, as Peter mentioned at the start of our service.

And I rather foolishly picked the longest one. But I wonder, how do you feel when it comes to reading the Bible?

I suspect I might be preaching to the choir here, but how do you feel when it comes to reading the Bible? I know for my family, we sometimes try to have family devotions, and the kids groan, or they go silly.

To try and frustrate me, they make up names for the Bible characters. So John the Baptist became Bob the Baptist. Can he baptize? Yes, he can. And they'd frustrate until we just gave up.

Of course, they're only doing what we did to my parents. We used to hide the family Bible until my dad gave up. Or we'd suddenly have to do homework. It was the only time we ever preferred to do homework.

[1:09] But how do we feel when it comes to reading the Bible? We all know we should do it, don't we? But sometimes it's hard to do. Suddenly, other things become more urgent, like homework or housework or any other work.

And sometimes it's just too hard to understand, and so we give up. How do we feel when it comes to reading the Bible? Do we delight in God's Word?

I remember at one of my old churches, as soon as the preacher opened his mouth, there was a man that went, beep, beep. It was quite a loud watch, so we could all hear it.

And it wasn't a stopwatch, it was a countdown timer. And so when it reached the countdown, the alarm went off if the guy was still preaching. He was a man who did not delight in God's Word, but knew he had to endure it.

Do we delight in God's Word? Do we endure God's Word? Now, I'm not suggesting that we have hour-long sermons and the Bible reading as the only element in the service, but what is it for us that is the high point?

[2:19] Is it reading God's Word, hearing it explained, or is it some other aspect like communion or singing or community? How do we delight in God's Word?

Well, today's psalm is written to help us do just that, because as we'll see, the psalmist does just that. But first, let me give you some bits of background.

Firstly, about the psalm itself. The psalm is very much all about God's Word. God's Word is mentioned in almost every verse, which is quite a few of them. But the writer uses different words to describe God's Word.

So if you've got your Bibles there, have a look at verse 1. Verse 1, we've got the word, the law or the Torah. So that's one of the words he uses to describe God's Word.

Verse 2, we've got statutes. Verse 4, precepts. Verse 5, decrees. Verse 6, commands.

[3:21] Verse 7, laws, plural, which refers to God's judgments or decisions, which are often about punishing the wicked in due time and rescuing his people.

And then on it goes. Verse 9, you've just got the normal word, word. And then later on, you have the word promise as well. Eight different descriptions of God's Word.

And he does that not just so we don't get bored, but so that he can capture every aspect, every nuance of God's Word. Such is his delight in it.

What's more, the psalm itself is structured around words or letters, actually. It's an acrostic poem where each stanza is based on a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

So under the title of Psalm 119 there, you might see a little what looks like a cross. That's the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the word or the letter Aleph. And then every verse in that first paragraph in the Hebrew, we don't recognize it in English, but in the Hebrew actually starts with that letter Aleph.

[4 : 29] And then the next stanza, you've got the Hebrew letter. It looks like Beth, but it's Bet or Vet and so on. So that's what it's based on. And there's 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, which means there are 22 paragraphs, each with eight verses in it.

22 times eight. Anyone? 176. Did you just do that off the top of your head or did you? 176.

It's long. It's the longest psalm. It's the longest chapter in the Bible. And you'll be glad to know we're not looking at it all today. But the second bit of background information is about the psalmist himself.

He's one of God's people. He describes himself 13 times as your servant. But people around him seem to have wandered away from God's word, like in verse 21.

And so verse 19, he feels like a stranger here on earth, which is not dissimilar to us. What's more, while he was afflicted with some sort of sickness in the past, he's now afflicted with persecution in the present.

[5 : 34] The persecution takes a form of lies, but either way, people are out to get him. In other words, our psalmist lives in a hostile world, just like we do today.

And yet, and yet he still delights in God's word, which brings us to our first point and our first big theme in the psalm, the delight of God's word.

Now, he does this in four different ways. Firstly, he simply just says he delights in God's word. So we're going to have to do a bit of skipping. I've tried to put some verses on the screen as well as we go, because we can't work our way through a whole 176 verses.

We'll have to do a couple of big themes. But we saw it in our reading, verse 14. Notice there, he says, I rejoice in following your statutes.

Or verse 16, I delight in God's decrees. Don't need to turn a page, but over the right-hand side, down the bottom, verse 47.

[6 : 38] Verse 47, I delight in your commands because I love them. Later on in verse 111, I think is on the screen. It says, your statutes are my heritage forever.

They are the joy of my heart. See, throughout the whole psalm, he's saying over and over again that he delights in God's word. And this secondly means that he values God's word.

So back in verse 16 again, have a look at verse 16 from our reading. He says, I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

That's what he's equating God's statutes, God's word with. I think on the screen is a couple other verses. Verse 103, how sweet are your words to my taste?

Sweeter than honey to my mouth. Honey is really sweet, right? The Bible is sweeter. Verse 72, on the same side there. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver.

[7 : 41] And not just silver, but and gold. You see, he delights in God's word so much so that he values the Bible more than his bank balance. I wonder how many of us could honestly say that.

But he does. Thirdly, his delight for God's word drives him to meditate on God's word, to ponder it, to think about it. So, for example, in verse 48, the bottom right hand side of the page there, verse 48, he says, I reach out for your commands, which I love, that I may meditate on your decrees. Or verse 97, which is there on the side as well. Oh, how I love your law. I meditated on it all day long.

Now, I don't think he means he never works and just reads the Bible, you know, nine to five. It's not a bad job. I've got something close to it, I guess. But he rather he's talking about that he ponders on God's word from time to time throughout the day.

But you see, his delight for God's word drives him to ponder it, to meditate it, to chew over it, to understand it. And not just understand it, but fourthly, to follow it, keep it, obey it.

[9 : 00] His delight for God's word means he's determined to obey it. So we saw that in verse 8 of our reading where he says, quite matter-of-factly, I will obey your decrees. Or verse 14, again, down the bottom of the column.

Verse, sorry, verse 16, verse 16. I delight in your decrees. I will not neglect your word. You see, because he delights in God's word, he is determined to keep it.

And this continues again throughout the whole psalm. So verse 112 says on the slide, my heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

Now, he's not saying he will do it absolutely. It's just a confident determination because he also says throughout the whole psalm that he needs God's help. Like in our reading in verse 12, praise be to you, Lord, teach me your ways.

Don't just teach me about your ways, but teach me to do your ways. Help me to keep them. And that phrase, teach me, is used 11 times throughout the psalm. Or verse 18, the top of the next column under the Hebrew letter Gimel, verse 18.

[10:16] Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. He needs God to open his eyes. Verse 33, just across the top of the next page.

Teach me, Lord. Verse 34, give me understanding. Verse 35, direct me in the path of your commands. Or on the slide, I think, is 102.

I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. You see, he knows he cannot keep God's law apart from God's help. And so verse 171 there as well.

My lips overflow with praise for you. Teach me your decrees. You see, his delight for God's word drives him to value it above all else.

And also to seek to obey it with God's help. And to meditate on it. To ponder it. My dad absolutely loves tennis.

[11:20] In fact, there's someone here this morning. He was at the women's final last night. He would be very jealous of that. He delights in tennis. So this time of year is like paradise for him and a nightmare for my mother.

But because he delights in tennis, then he values tennis above all other sports. It's the only one he watches. It's the only one he plays. What's more, because he delights in it, he meditates, thinks about it, thinks about who's around that he could ring up for a hit.

In fact, he even carries a spare tennis racket in the boot of his car wherever he goes, just in case. True. He's coming to visit in a couple of weeks' time, and I'm pretty sure he's going to bring his tennis racket.

And he delights in tennis so much so that he's determined to follow every game, records the ones that he misses when he's going out, just so he doesn't miss them rather.

See, God's word is like this for the psalmist. He delights in it so much so that he values it above all else, sweeter than honey, better than money. He meditates or thinks about it during the day, and he's determined to follow every word of it with God's help.

[12:33] Why? Why does he have such delight in God's word? Why does he value it more than his bank balance? Well, because of what God's word enables him to do.

It enables him to live a happy life in a hostile world. And here we come to point two, the second big thing we're going to look at. It's got some sub-themes under it, but we're going to start at the beginning of the psalm now.

So have a look at the beginning of the psalm, verses one to three. Here we read, Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.

Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. Now, these are the only three verses. Sorry, they do no wrong, but follow his ways.

These are the only three verses in the whole psalm that don't address God in some way. And they stand at the very beginning of the psalm, like a statement, a creed-like statement.

[13:37] This is what God's word does. It makes a person blessed. And the word blessed means happy in the sense of contentment and peace.

Of course, our world thinks happiness is found in wealth and health, but those things do not last, do they? Our wealth goes much quicker than it comes.

Or is that just my house? No? Is it everyone's house? Health is often up and down, and unfortunately, more down than up as we get older. And so lasting happiness cannot come from these things, because they don't last.

Rather, it comes from a life with God. Why? Well, because God is always with us. He is constant. And so the contentment found in God can be constant.

What's more, we were actually created for life with God. One of the great heroes of the early church was a man called Augustine, and he said this, I think it's on the next slide.

[14 : 40] He said, he's praying to God, You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. See what he's talking about there?

We are made for life with God, and so until we find life with God, we'll never have lasting contentment. We'll be restless. That's why non-Christians have to keep looking for happiness in all sorts of different places.

They try this place, then this place, then this place, because none of them last. But true happiness, true blessedness, that lasting contentment through the ups and downs of life, comes from life with God.

Mark Chu mentioned last year a man called Philip Ng, who's on the next slide, I think. Here he is. He's a property developer in Singapore. He, with his brother, their net worth is about \$12 billion. So he has a bit of money, right? And yet he became a Christian, and this is what he wrote on the next slide. He says, I was always in search of a better life, a better purpose, a better me, a better everything, you know, happiness.

[15 : 49] But I was just looking in all the wrong places. What I have discovered is that all of us are broken. We all have a missing piece. For me, I discovered that missing piece was God through Jesus Christ.

It's true, though, isn't it? He had it all, but it did not bring lasting happiness, that deep contentment, that blessed life, until he found life with God through Christ.

Our best happy life with God comes from the word of God. So verse one again, blessed are those who walk according to the law of the Lord. Or verse two, blessed are those who keep his word, his statutes.

You see, the word of God is what brings the blessed life with God. For it's God's word that makes us his people, that we can begin the blessed life in the first place, that we can find true happiness, contentment, like Philip did.

For us, it's the word about Jesus Christ, how he died for us on the cross, and that all who believe in him can be forgiven and given a place as one of God's people. But God's word not only begins the new life, the blessed life, it's also what enables us to live it out, to keep enjoying it, even in a hostile world.

[17 : 11] Take two people, both two people going for surgery, two people who are therefore anxious about it. They're both Christians, but one remembers to read God's word and reads, Philippians 4 verse 6, do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition present your request to God, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The other person forgets to read God's word. Who do you think is going to be more at peace when they go into surgery? I've seen it happen both ways.

See, God's word enables us to live out the blessed life we have so we can enjoy it rather than miss out on it. And that's what the psalmist now goes on to talk about.

How God's word helps him to live out this blessed life. Firstly, because God's word helps him to walk with God without sin. And that happens in a number of ways.

Have a look at verses 5 and 6. He says, Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees, then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.

[18 : 29] You see what he's saying there? Verse 5, he wants to obey God's word so that verse 6, then he would not be put to shame when he doesn't keep God's word.

You see, reading the Bible is actually what helps us to keep God's word. God's spirit works through the Bible to convict us and to encourage us to keep his word, his commandments.

And so as we read the Bible, it helps us not to do the things that we're going to later feel ashamed of. In other words, God's word keeps us, protects us from shame by telling us the right things to do so that we can have a clear conscience.

Do you see verse 7? So you'll be protected from shame and instead, verse 7, I will praise you with an upright heart, a clear conscience, as I learn your righteous decrees.

You see, God's word sustains our walk with God against sin by firstly protecting us from shame and helping us to have a clear conscience. And protecting us from shame might not sound like a big deal, but shame does take away happiness, does it not?

[19 : 40] Even if we have wealth and health, shame can take away whatever happiness is found in that too. In fact, shame can even take away our lives. A year and a half ago, a Melbourne writer

who writes for The Age and Sydney Morning Herald and ABC, Ben Pajobi, I don't know how you pronounce his surname, but this is him on the next slide.

He wrote an article in The Age or The Sydney Morning Herald, I can't remember which, and he says this on the next slide there. He says, I was burning all over with embarrassment. My body felt like it was coming apart at the seams, breaking up like a submarine that had dived too deep under the pressure of the shame and guilt of what I had done, the trouble I had caused.

It was shame that had driven me to declare my desire to end my life. Now, I'm not exactly sure what he did here. He says in the article he just didn't feel good enough.

But shame impacts us, doesn't it? But God's word protects us from that shame, especially God's word in Christ. For God's word in Christ tells us we don't have to be good enough for God.

Jesus has died to forgive us for all who trust in Christ. And in Christ we find great self-worth in being his dearly loved people.

[20 : 54] So God's word in Christ not only protects us from shame by telling us what things to avoid, it also frees us from guilt and shame altogether by forgiveness and reminders of who we are in Christ.

Sadly, Ben has not yet found Christ and so he also wrote in the article I don't think I'll ever stop feeling the shame completely. You see, God's word protects us from that and it matters.

It makes a difference. It helps us to enjoy the blessed life. And on the flip side, God's word also leads us in holiness. Have a look at verse 9. Verse 9, how can a young man, he's actually talking about himself, how can a young man stay on the path of purity?

Well, by living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart. Do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

As I said, the psalmist is talking about himself in verse 9. These verses are applicable to older men as well as younger women and older women. And he says, how can he stay on the path of purity?

[22 : 00] How can he live a holy life? The answer, according to your word, you see. It's like verse 105 of the psalm which is a relatively well-known verse.

It says, your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. I'm sure many of you have heard of that one. God's word leads us on the path of purity or holiness. That's why he asked God not to let him wander from God's commands or word.

That's why he has stored up God's word in his heart so that he might not sin against God. He might remember God's word and not sin. I think it's a real shame actually that we seem to have lost the art of memory verses these days in our churches.

It's a great way of storing God's word in our hearts, is it not? So that we might remember it and we might be kept from sin. And so that we don't feel shame but we have a clear conscience and enjoy the blessed life and so on.

I remember teaching a group of kids a memory verse from the letter of Philippians. You'll see why I chose this one when I read it to you. It's Philippians chapter 2 verse 14. It says, do everything without grumbling and arguing.

[23 : 12] I thought it was a good one for the kids although a couple of days later it was a good one for me too. And in God's kindness he reminded me of it and it kept me from grumbling as well.

God's word helps us to walk with him without sinning by protecting us from shame, leading us in holiness and even growing our relationship.

And notice verse 10 again. The psalmist says that he seeks God with all his heart which means he wants to know God more deeply, please him more fully. But do you notice how seeking God with all his heart is also parallel with not straying from his ways.

The two lines are meant to be read together. We see the same thing in verse 2, back in verse 2.

Blessed are those who keep God's statutes which is parallel with seeking him with all their heart.

It's two sides of the one coin. In other words, the way to seek God with all our heart is to read and keep God's word. I know you know this, but so many Christians forget it.

Here at HGD we do go on a bit about the Bible. In fact, one of the best insults I've ever heard was from another minister at a church not far from here. I heard it second hand.

[24 : 27] There were some people who moved down from Sydney for work. They've since moved back for work. But they were looking for a church to visit and they went to his church first. They didn't use the Bible a whole lot there and so this couple asked the minister, is that normal?

Do you watch your thoughts of the Bible? That sort of thing. He got a bit shirty and indignant and he said with a tone of disgust, oh if you really want a church that goes on about the Bible you should go to Holy Trinity Doncaster.

Best insult ever. It's a compliment really. Now we mustn't let that go to our heads because it's only by God's grace we're like that. But you see the reason we do go on about the Bible is not because we worship it as sometimes we're accused of but because it enables us to worship the God who speaks it.

It's what enables us to seek God with all our heart, to grow in our relationship with him, to know him more deeply and to please him more fully. And so God's word helps us to walk with God without sin by protecting us from shame, leading us in holiness and growing our relationship with him so that we can enjoy this blessed life that God has bought for us with Christ's blood.

But God's word also enables us to live out this blessed life even despite suffering. See verse 17, have a look verse 17. He says, Be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word.

[25 : 52] Open my eyes that I might see wonderful things in your law. I'm a stranger on earth. Do not hide your commands from me. In other words, don't let your commands be strange as well.

My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. You rebuke the arrogant who are a curse, those who stray from your commands. Remove from me their scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes.

Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight, they are my counsellors.

Here we see that our psalmist is suffering as a stranger in a hostile world. Other people have strayed from God's commands and now it seems they are persecuting him for not strain.

And so verse 20, he longs for God's law because verse 24, God's word or law is his delight and his counsellor. Just like counsellors reassure their patience and help them persevere, so too God's word reassures us and helps us persevere in suffering.

[27 : 00] And is that not true for us with persecution as well as sickness and loss? I remember around the time of the votes and there was a growing intolerance towards Christianity on social media, think Margaret Court and all that.

We were doing a sermon series in the book of Daniel which reminds us that God is in control and that kingdoms rise, kingdoms fall, but he's over them all. And I had a number of people come and tell me how reassuring it was that we were doing that part of God's word at that particular time in our nation's history.

You see, God's word at that moment was their counsellor, reassuring, encouraging. It works similarly, God's word also comforts us in suffering.

So in verse 50, I don't know if this is on the 50 to 52, he says, my comfort in my suffering is this, your promise preserves my life. The arrogant mock me unmercifully, but I do not turn from your law. I remember Lord, your ancient judgments or laws, and I find comfort in them. You see, as he reads God's word, he is reminded of God's promise to never leave him or forsake him.

[28 : 14] He's reminded of God's judgments to one day punish the wicked and restore his kingdom, and all of that comforts him in persecution. And it's true when we suffer loss as well.

I've conducted more funerals than I'd like to. I mean, one funeral is one too many, but God's word gives real comfort that we will see our loved ones again in Christ, that gives real comfort that God understands firsthand what suffering is like, what suffering and loss is like.

A comfort of knowing God is still with us and will help us, even though it will be hard. That's why I know Christians who have suffered greatly, yet somehow can still find contentment and a smile and peace.

Have you known Christians like that? The ones I've known are also the ones who read their Bibles regularly. In fact, God's word cannot only counsel us and comfort us, it also refreshes us, renews us.

And we get a glimpse of that later on, I think on the next slide, verse 54, it says, your statutes have been my songs. In verse 62, at midnight I rise to praise you, that is in song, because of your righteous rules or judgments.

[29 : 36] In other words, God's word renews him to the point that he's able to even sing in his suffering. Last December, I think they found the mass grave of those Christians who were beheaded back in 2015.

I think that was the image, you might remember that image. But at the time, it was reported that not only they kept their faith, these 21 Christians, but apparently they were singing songs too. Isn't that extraordinary? You see, they knew God's word which spoke of the hope of glory to come. And it not only sustained their faith, it even renewed it to the point of singing before their death. You see, God's word not only gives us the blessed life where we have a relationship with him, it's also what helps us to live it out, to enjoy it, to find contentment in a hostile world. And if we had more time, we'd see that God's word also provides our hope for life, it guides us with wisdom, it actually sets us free. In short, God's word, I think on the next slide, verses 92 and 93, preserves our life.

[30 : 50] 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. Can you see why he now delights in God's word?

Because of all it does for him. And so the question for us is, will we continue to delight in God's word this year? We've been given the blessed life in Christ, we know God as our father, we have the hope of glory before us.

Are we going to listen to God's word, meditate on ponder it, so that we can enjoy the blessed life Christ has brought for us? I know many of you did, in fact, I was talking with someone this morning who listens to the Bible on audio and follows along, and she says it adds another dimension and it's really helpful, but also know others who find it hard to make time for it.

If that's you, take just five minutes, one minute to read, just read a stanza of Psalm 119, there's the next 22 days sorted, come and see me afterwards. Take one minute to read it and then four minutes to meditate, to think about it, we don't want to just read it, okay, tick, I've done my quiet time, I feel good now, off I go.

We want to take time to meditate on and ponder it, what does this mean for us, being encouraged by it? And above all, pray that God might open our eyes to see wonderful things in his word, because without his help, we will not understand it, nor will we keep it.

[32 : 29] I need to finish. Martin Neumola, Neumola, thank you, a German pastor who opposed Hitler and so was arrested, he spent seven years in Dachau concentration camp, the last four of them were in solitary confinement before being set free by the allies in 1945.

That's him on the slide, he wrote this on the next one, I think it is, this is what he wrote about the Bible, the word of God was simply everything to me, comfort and strength, guidance and hope, my master by day and my companion by night and solitary confinement ceased to be solitary.

Even in the concentration camp he could find contentment, he could live out the blessed life, how? Through the Bible. Thank God we don't have concentration camps like that anymore, but let's pray we do have the same view of God's word.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we do thank you for this psalm and although it's long, its length and repetition help us to love your word more and more as we continue to come back to how good it is. Father, we pray that you would help us to delight in your word this year, to value it above all else, to meditate and ponder upon it and with your help to follow and obey it.

[33 : 57] We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.