

Building Memories of God's Word

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- [0 : 0 0] I like to have said I taught him everything I know, but seeing that my status is not more than a donkey, then, yeah, he gets all his talent from his mother and all his bad habits from me, or at least that's what I'm told, but we'll see.
- We're going to pray, and then I'd like you to open God's word to Psalm 119. We're not going to read it all because it's a very long psalm, but we'll get there.
- Father, we ask that you would help us to read your word for the purpose of understanding what it means. And so as we come to it, we recognize that we have to let go of what we might think it means.
- We have to let go of anything that we are committed to that's not consistent with your word. And, Father, that's difficult because those are the things that actually blind us from seeing your word properly.
- But help us this morning, Father, just to find the beauty of your word coming through to us with great clarity. And so we ask for that in Jesus' name because we want to hear you speak to us, not anyone else.
- [1 : 3 5] We want your word to ring truth, ring true in our heart. In Jesus' name. Amen. So if you'd like to turn to Psalm 119, and if you'd like to make your way to verse 89, and we'll read from verse 89 through to 112.
- These are three key sections within Psalm 119.
- Lamed, Mem, and Nun, which is headed over 89, over 97, and over 105. And they form a section all by themselves.
- And you'll notice this as we read. So beginning at verse 89, now hear God's word. Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.
- Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day.
- [2 : 4 6] For all things are your servants. 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 given me life.
- I am yours, save me. For I have sought your precepts. The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies. I have seen a limit to all my, to all perfection.
- But your commandment is exceedingly broad. O how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies.
- For it is ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers. For your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged.
- For I keep your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.
- [3 : 5 1] How sweet are your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through your precepts I get understanding. Therefore I hate every false way.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it. To keep your righteous rules.

I am severely afflicted. Give me life, O Lord, according to your word. Accept my freewill offering of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules. I hold my life in my hand continually.

But I do not forget your law. The wicked have laid a snare before me. But I do not stray from your precepts. Your testimonies are my heritage forever.

For they are the joy of my heart. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever to the end. Well, may God bless the reading of his word.

[4 : 50] Good. Well, there is no need to turn to any other part of the Bible this morning, though I'll be reflecting on other parts.

If Psalm 8 last week was about the fact that you have God's attention, something which I hope you went away remembering for the whole week, that you live with God's attention on you.

And it's only his attention you should look for. It's only his words that you should look to hear. And it's words from him.

And so to live in the assurance that you have God's attention is a wonderful assurance, but also a reminder that he keeps an eye on every step that we make.

Well, if Psalm 8 was about that, then Psalm 119 teaches us that we have God's word. Psalm 8, we have God's attention. Psalm 119, in this section, we have God's word.

[6 : 00] And it's bookended, the section that we've read, I hope you saw, with the word forever. So verse 1, forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.

And it finishes in verse 12, forever to the end. I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever to the end.

And everything in between is what the psalmist builds his memory with. And that's probably a practice that not too many Christians remember to do, to build your memory.

When you read God's word, what you're doing is that you're building a memory. A very important memory. For your memory is like a storehouse. For when you need it, you've got something there to draw on.

And there's nothing worse than going to a cupboard and finding it empty, having nothing to take out of it for when you need it. Imagine hunger pains and going to a cupboard to get some food, and there's just nothing there.

[7 : 03] Well, in the same way, some pains within life are caused by the absence of food. God's food, his word. Man does not live by bread alone.

And so it's a deceitful thing to believe that you can. It's a deceitful thing that you can get through this world simply by the means of physical food. When God has told us that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from his mouth.

You need that food. And so you don't want to go to the cupboard and find there's nothing there. So it's important to build a memory. And as you build a memory, you're filling the storehouse.

And when you need it, you go into the storehouse and you're able to eat. You're able to feast. Now, the benefit is that you have the word of God at home.

You're able to go to it and open it, and you have a feast every time you go to it. But my concern is not when you're at home or perhaps not when you have your Bible on you.

[8 : 03] But when you're in a position where you're called to make a decision, and you need something to draw on to help you make those decisions, and there's nothing there. The word of God is the very thing that ought to inform all of our decisions.

And when you go to the cupboard for decision-making time, there's nothing there to draw on. Where's my understanding in order to make a good decision? Memory lapses are dangerous depending on what it is that you're forgetting.

Now, if you forget to buy milk on your way home, okay, that's not a big deal, but that can happen. It was a memory lapse. But Peter says in the New Testament, as he writes in 2 Peter in particular, that some memory lapses, such as amnesia, could be dangerous.

If it's severe, then you can actually forget who you are. Peter's writing to a group of Christians who have got spiritual amnesia.

They have forgotten who they are. And so how can they live like Christians if they do not remember that they are Christians? How can they live like God's people if they do not remember that they are God's people?

[9 : 20] So it's really important that you build a memory with the word of God in order to live according to that word of God. And memory lapses of any kind are not...

Minor ones are frustrating, but serious ones are just heartbreaking. I can remember once ministering to a man who had...

You're going to have to forgive me. He either had dementia or Alzheimer's. I don't remember. But I can remember that it got so serious that he was actually becoming quite violent. And he was old and his wife was old.

And just before he died, he ended up in hospital. And he couldn't remember anything. He didn't know who I was. And he had been in the church for years.

And I can remember sitting in his bed and starting to read a psalm. And he finished it. Okay, why? Because the Spirit of God brings to our remembrance the things that we have been taught.

[10 : 22] Okay, that's the assurance. One of my favorite assurances is the thief on the cross who says to Jesus, Will you remember me when you...

Okay. When you go, will you remember me? In other words, he understood that his salvation or possible salvation was not based on what he remembered about Jesus, but on whether or not Jesus would remember him.

So we understand that memory lapses causes problems. And in some cases, they're heartbreaking, especially when they happen within a family environment. You forget who you are.

But imagine that spiritually. Imagine that here you are. You've served Christ. Okay? And you've been full on for Jesus.

And you've loved him. And you've talked about him. And you've read his word. And you've expounded his word. You've just enjoyed it. And then over the years, you develop spiritual amnesia.

[11 : 27] And suddenly, you lose your identity. Suddenly, you no longer look like a Christian. You no longer sound like a Christian. You no longer act like a...

It all disappears. The question is that, of course, I believe that God's grace is greater than our sin because the Bible teaches us that. But at the same time, I'm responsible to teach you God's word to say, you have to build your memory.

You have to build your memory with the word of God. So here's the summary of how that happens. You'll notice that both it begins and ends with this idea of forever.

The word of God being established in the heart of the believer forever. In the same way, the word of God is fixed in the heavens forever. It's established. It doesn't move.

And so if the word of God does that with the whole of creation, then we can expect it to do the same in our life. The word of God is fixed in the heavens. And so we're able to tell, because it's fixed, that he's been faithful throughout those generations.

[12 : 33] In the same way we, in Psalm 8, we understood that if this is true about one thing that God has done, then it will be true about another thing because God is the center. He's the faithful one.

Well, if God's word does this in the heavens, if it's able to establish the earth and keep it still, then it's able to do the same thing for you. We're able to tell that God is faithful by looking at the things that God has been faithful with.

The earth, the heavens, the stars. And so God appoints things with his words. He brings it into existence. That's what creation is about. It's really about the power of God's word to alter things, to change things, to create things that exist that did not previously exist.

This is why we go forth and tell the gospel. Because people need faith and the word of God, how are they going to have faith? Well, the word of God creates faith.

That's what we're told. The reason we go and tell the gospel to people is because the word of God creates faith. So as we tell them the gospel, we are creating in them the very thing that they need to believe.

[13 : 42] Faith in God. So the word of God appoints. It creates. God appoints through his word and those things which he appoints, like us, the stars, the moon, the sun, then serve him.

Those things then, verse 93 in particular, are never to be forgotten. You are to build them into your memory. You are to commit them to memory and to practice.

Because having a good memory about a subject is how we make better decisions. Okay? We've all remembered those times when we're faced with a math question, you know, at the age of 44 that you did when you were 12.

And suddenly, I can't remember it being that difficult. Right? And what happens is you were able to do it at one point, but over time, okay, the memory of how to do it disappears.

And suddenly, you can't, you don't know how to do it. You don't know how to work it out. You just don't know what decision to make. Spiritually, it's exactly the same. If you fill your storehouse, your memory storehouse with the word of God, it'll help you to make those decisions.

[14 : 52] And so, you will know what it's like when you've made a bad decision and then remember later on, how could I have forgotten that? If I'd remembered that when I was making the decision, I would have made the decision that I did.

All of that comes down to memory. When you have a good memory, when your memory is full of the right things, you're able to think clearly. You're able to make better decisions.

But when you forget those things and then you make a decision, what did I do that for? If you think about it, you're able to trace it back to the fact that you knew it already. You always knew it, but for some reason, you forgot it and you went ahead and made a bad decision.

We all feel the annoyance of making a decision that we should never have made. And then, in hindsight, knowing the reasons why we should never have made it.

So, this psalm is telling us that building your memory with the Word of God is not a small activity. It's actually one of the most important things that a Christian believer can do.

[15 : 58] Building a memory with the Word of God will help you to think clearly. It'll help you to walk following the Lord Jesus Christ. It'll keep your feet where they ought to be. It'll keep you spiritually stable and strong and secure.

But not only that, it will make you the type of person that will be able to defend the lies of the wicked people. Okay? People tell lies and people can say hurtful things.

How do you cope with that? Well, you remember the things which are true about you according to what God has said. I don't know if you remember, years ago I preached a sermon at a Corinthians where I said the temptation of people, a family environment, possibly a church.

We hope that that never is the case, but it was the case for Paul, is a human courtroom of opinions. And Paul had to say to that church, to that group of people, some whom were Christians, some who may not have been, that I won't live in your courtroom.

Not only do I not care about what you think about me, more importantly, I don't even care what I think about me. And sometimes we want to say, well, the way that we'll get through it is by not caring what other people think about me.

[17 : 15] No. That's only half the battle. You've not even got to care what you think about you. And so Paul concludes, I'm not going to pass judgment before time. I only care about what God thinks about me.

Because God is the only one who knows the true measure of my soul. He's the only one who knows what I am really like. And in his eyes, I'm perfect in Christ. And in his eyes, I am forgiven.

I am righteous. I cannot be any more perfect than what I am right now. That's how you can go ahead into the world and keep your head up high. Other things might be true, but not in God's eyes they're not.

Because he always sees you in accordance with his word. If his word says you're forgiven, then you're forgiven. Okay? Learn to see yourself according to the word of God.

Okay? Learn to see yourself. Build that memory in, you know, build it. Build your memory with the word of God. So as he meditates on the law every day, verses 97 through to 104, he then begins to receive the benefits of the word of God.

[18 : 25] He begins to receive the benefits of being committed to the word of God. He says, for instance, that the word, verse 105, is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path.

Now he sees where he is, and now he sees where he's going. And there's nothing more frustrating than being taken somewhere not knowing where you're going.

God is forever telling his people, this is where you're going to end up. This is the direction you ought to be going in because this is where I'm taking you.

And when we consider where God is taking us, we ought to be running there. None of us ought to be dragging our feet. If we do, then we've not really captured the vision of what God has promised for those who love him.

So God's word alone is the lamp unto our feet and the light unto our path. You cannot see where you're going without it. You cannot even see where you are without it.

[19 : 31] You can't see anything without it, clearly. So though you think, well, of course you're saying that because you proclaim the word every week. I proclaim the word every week because it's true.

Okay? It's because it's true I proclaim the word to you every week. Why is it important? Well, in order to build a memory, you build a memory to be established, to be a firm, stable person.

And when we pay attention, as he says back in verse 19, to God's faithfulness, and we understand how God's word is able to keep things all secure, we recognize that the same will apply to us.

But if God's word can do that for the world, God's word can do that for us. If God's word can establish the earth and make that stand firmly fixed, then God's word can do exactly the same for me.

I will be established by the same means that God establishes everything else. Okay? I will be established as a person by the same means that God establishes everything else, which is his word.

[20 : 38] His word, verse 93, is the very thing that has given me life. Don't forget that. The truth has set you free. The word of life has given you that life. Okay?

The word has given you faith. It produces something that you cannot find anywhere else in the world. It doesn't exist in the world. You cannot find it anywhere else.

The word is creative. It produces it. And so by listening to the word, things begin to happen that did not previously happen. That's the benefit of your commitment. That's the benefit of being committed to it.

You receive the blessings in the same way you plant it, and it grows, and it brings forth fruit. It's something new. It's something new. That's why you're to build your memory with the word of God.

The other reason in terms of being established is that you will notice, if you just observe your own life, that when you forget the faithfulness of God, you begin to forget your own faithfulness.

[21 : 35] When you question the faithfulness of God, your own faithfulness begins to fail. Okay? When you think that God isn't committed to you, your own commitment to God begins to diminish.

So what we think about God and his word affects our own faithfulness. What we think about God's faithfulness will affect our faithfulness. What we think about God's commitment to us will affect our commitment to him.

That's just the way that it is. If in the same way, if you don't believe God answers your prayers, you stop praying. One follows from the next.

So when you question the faithfulness of God, your own faithfulness is at the tipping point. Okay? When you don't believe in the faithfulness of God, your own faithfulness begins to diminish rapidly.

When you begin to question the commitment of God to you, then your own faithfulness to him, commitments to him, just falls by the wayside. And these are the type of things that we're to be mindful of.

[22 : 41] These are the type of things that we are to remember. And the only way to remember his faithfulness is to remember it through his word. When God's faithfulness is no longer found in your heart and in your mind, your faithfulness is no longer found in the church or in your Christian life before him.

It diminishes. When one goes, the other goes because the word creates that faithfulness. Everything is created by God's word. And so when you forget God's word, you forget that the blessings of God's word disappear with it.

That's how we are meant to understand what this psalm is directing our attention to. So what you know about the word of God, what you believe, what you commit to will affect your own stability, will affect whether or not you're established.

And, you know, we've known plenty of Christians who have, you know, grown up in the church and then forgotten God's faithfulness or at least questioned God's faithfulness.

Forgotten God's commitments or questioned God's commitments. And we've seen that as they question God, okay, their own faithfulness is questionable. Their own commitments is questionable.

[23 : 57] And they fall away. This isn't rocket science. It's really fairly simple to understand. And so when you notice this in your own life, you'll notice that as you come back to the Lord, the first thing that you do is that you're coming back to what the Lord is saying.

You're coming, you're believing it. You're taking it at, as it's spoken to you, and you're receiving it. Now, this isn't about the fact that no Christian should ever wander.

But this is about how you can stop wandering. Okay? This isn't about how, you know, Christians never wander. Christians do wander.

Christians, that does happen. We have plenty of stories throughout the New Testament where that does happen. But God is always one that teaches us that prevention is better than cure.

God would rather have a fence at the top of the cliff than an ambulance at the bottom. Okay? And many of us, many of us are being picked up by the ambulance because we've jumped the fence.

[25 : 02] And God's word is the fence. And the more word you have, the higher the fence is to jump. Okay? It's the thing that keeps us safe.

And that leads to a confident Christianity. Okay? Not confidence in yourself, but confidence in the word. So, in verse 99, he says, I have more understanding than all my teachers.

He goes on to say that I have more understanding than even the age, that is, people who are older than me. Now, I want you to notice the difference here. By using the word understanding rather than saying knowledge or the knowledge of subjects, a distinction is being made.

He's not saying that he knows as many subjects as his teachers or that his encyclopedic knowledge is as great as his teachers. What he's saying is, is that he may understand, he may know far less, but he understands far more.

So, the issue is not about how much knowledge of the world you have. The issue is always about how much you understand of the knowledge you have. So, you have a full Bible in front of you, and the question is not, do you know that?

[26 : 20] Of course you know that. The issue is, do you understand it? Okay? You know you have the same amount of words, hopefully the same amount of words, in your Bible as I have in mine.

And the issue is not, well, I know that. And I know that there's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I know that the book of the Bible, there's 66 books in the Bible. I know that. Okay. That's not the issue.

The issue is, do you understand what those books are saying? And so, the Word of God, and of course with the wisdom of God, gives us that understanding. We make better decisions, not with more knowledge, but with greater understanding.

Okay? We make better decisions as Christians, not with knowing more of the Bible, but by actually understanding more of the Bible. So, what this person is saying is, yeah, you may know a lot more than me.

You may be able to quote all the kings of Scotland and England right back to the very first time. You may be able to know all the capital cities of the world. You may be right up to date with every ecological and political decision that's being made in the world.

[27 : 31] Okay? You may know all of that. But what do you understand about you? What do you understand about you?

God is teaching us about us and about how we walk with him. So, he says, verse 109, I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.

Okay? I hold my life in your hand continually, but I do not forget your law. What is he saying? Well, this is like really, really important.

There's a few precious things that I have. Okay? My books would be precious. But since they've been in the dining room, you know, or dining room, tea room, dinner table room, you know.

And I can remember once opening a book that I was very precious about, thinking, how on earth did spaghetti bolognese get inside the book? I can understand how it stuck to the app, but how did it get inside?

[28 : 33] Well, I've still not figured it out, and no one's come forth saying, Dad, it was me. Unless, of course, it was my wife. Okay?

But precious things. What do you do with precious things? Well, you hold them. Okay? Now, imagine this, that you're out in the middle of town, perhaps off in a side street, and it's late at night, and you're carrying a lot of money in your open hand.

It's in your hand. You immediately know the vulnerability that that would bring. People see what you're carrying, and because people see what you're carrying in your hand, you feel the tenseness of the situation.

You feel the vulnerability of having that. You feel the danger of it being taken from you. Says the psalmist, I hold my life in my hand.

I hold my life in my hand. But, he says, I do not forget your law. In other words, he considers what he's holding.

[29 : 33] And he considers how precious his life is, how valuable his life is. And he thinks, what's the best way to carry this? What is the best way to carry my life? And he says, I do not forget your law.

I do not forget your word. The best way to look after my life and to keep it secure is not to forget your law. Okay? Imagine, and we carry far less precious things around with us with a greater sense of security over them than we do our own life at times.

You know, we buy safe for passports, but we carry our life into dangerous, perhaps, areas of temptation. Well, that's far greater than your passport being lost or your driver's license being lost.

Okay? Or even your bank cards being lost. You know, you can even buy these special things now so that people don't take money off them wirelessly or whatever. And you have special wallets that protect that kind of wireless theft.

The measures that we go to protect other things that we carry around seem, at times, to outweigh the measures that we actually take to hold our own life in our hands carefully.

[30 : 47] We don't seem to be taking the right kind of measures there. And so the psalmist says, no, I've thought about this. And the best way to hold my life safely is never, ever to forget your law.

So as we sort of bring this to a conclusion then, recognize what he is saying. That God lights our path. He lights it for us so that we would know where we're going, so that we would not depart from it.

We're able to look back over where we have been, but the point here is forward thinking, forward motion. We can't do anything about what has happened, but we can make sure the same thing happens again if it's positive and the same thing doesn't happen again if it's negative.

God is teaching us to look with clarity, to build a memory so that we can see where we are going. And the best way to do this, the psalmist says, is to pledge my life to God.

I'm going to pledge my life to God, and I'm not going to compete with him over it. Once I've given my life to God, once I've made that commitment, I'm then not going to compete over my life with God.

[32 : 01] But the question is always for the Christian, well, who's going to have the most influence over my life, God or me? But the psalmist is saying here, no, once I've pledged my life to God, there's no competition.

But there is competition, isn't there? How many of us here actually compete for our own life with God? God knows what's best for us, and we're competing for a reign over it, or at least an equal reign over it.

No, if we've pledged it to God, it belongs to God. And it's easy to spot someone who competes for their own life and wins, because they don't devote themselves to the things that Scripture says they ought to devote themselves to.

Don't compete for your life. If you've pledged it to God, it's his. Don't compete for it. It's no longer yours. Here's the exhortation as we close.

The word of God is fixed, and therefore it doesn't move. But it doesn't follow from that that you won't move from it. But there is a way to not move from it, and that is by building your memory with it.

[33 : 13] You need to go away, and you need to read the word for understanding and build your memory, so that you can draw on it when you need it. And you need to read the word in times when you have no troubles, so that when you do have troubles, you have enough to get you through.

You need to fill the storehouse. You can afford to think, well, this is manageable. I may not be in the right place, but it's manageable. Okay.

But what are you going to do when it's not manageable? Okay. Manageable things become unmanageable very quickly. The type of decisions you need to make is to have them so that they're not just manageable, but they never get to become unmanageable.

So the call is to incline your heart, verse 122, and to perform God's statutes to the very end forever. Commit yourself to them.

Build your memory with them. Receive the blessings from them. Have them to draw on them when you need them the very most. Recognize that God's authority over you is one of love and one of protection, and that is not something to compete against, which means that all the desires that you have, all the feelings that you have, all the emotions that you have, all of those things which can cause you to make the decisions you do, all of them have to have the reign of God over them.

[34 : 42] God's word has to reign over them also, not just your words and your will, but your desires, your feelings, your emotions. So God's word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.

So don't think of this as a torch in your hand. Because you might just think of it that way. The way a torch works is you point the torch in the direction you want to go, and then once it's lit, you follow it.

That's not what it's saying here. God's word is a lamp to our feet. God's light sets our steps. Okay? We don't decide where we're going to go and then shine the light because it's dark.

It's the other way around. God's light sets the direction that establishes the step that we ought to take. So it's a final thought. The Psalms are full of those people who struggle to remain faithful to God at times.

But though they struggle, they come to the conclusion that God is faithful. And as I remember God's faithfulness, my own faithfulness begins to build.

[35 : 49] They have built their memories so that they can draw on them at a later date. They have built their memories so that they're able to think clearly and make good decisions. But the moment they forget God's faithfulness, their own faithfulness is being forgotten.

The moment they question God's commitment to them, their own commitments begin to tilt. God calls us to make commitments to him in a world that's always changing so that you don't change.

Okay? Okay? The very definition of a commitment is to make a decision when everything else is changing in a time so that you don't change.

And when you take back previous commitments because things have changed, it undermines the very principle of making the commitment in the first place. We walk in the world with our life constantly in our hands.

And God is saying, this is how you take care of it. You listen to my word. You devote yourself to my word so that you may not depart from it.

[36 : 53] My word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. You want to carefully carry your life through this world? Then do it in the light. See where you're going.

And don't do it in the dark. And as you do this, remember that God's faithfulness to you is without fault. God's faithfulness to you is without fault.

He is forever faithful even when we are faithless. Amen.