

How to Grow Through the word

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Psalm 119

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Bible Text: Psalm 119:33-40
Preached On: Sunday, February 11, 2024

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This morning I want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Psalm 119. The book of Psalms typically right there in the middle of your Bible, Psalm 119. Today we're going to begin in verse 33 and if you're a guest or visitor with us or maybe you haven't had the opportunity to worship with us in some while, I want to invite you to a journey through the Bible's longest chapter. Psalm 119 has 176 verses. It's subdivided into 22 respective sections. Today, we're going to begin in verse 33 but the reason for doing so or studying this longest chapter of the Bible is really twofold. The first one is this, that if you're a guest or visitor, you may or may not be aware, but we as a church body, as a family of faith, throughout this calendar year, we're challenging ourselves to hide the word of God within our heart, respectively, a chapter a person, the entirety of the scripture over the course of the entirety of our church family. That's kind of our goal. That's kind of our challenge to each other throughout this year. Secondly, one of the reasons we're studying Psalm 119, as we're memorizing our respective chapters, is to remind us of the impact and the influence that the word of God should have in our lives.

Now, as we come to verse 33, before we read the text, there's something that I want to address, not just about Psalm 119, but really this kind of section of our Bible. We typically refer to this section of the Bible as what we know as wisdom literature, and the reason I want to address that this morning is unlike the gospels, unlike the prophets, unlike the letters of whom we know as the Apostle Paul, at times, particularly today, there seems to be no natural flow. In other words, it's not a story that has a beginning, a plot, and an ending. There are these biblically directed anecdotes that God gives us that at times can be somewhat appearance of disjointedness, but all work together. The reason that's important is because today we're going to talk about how the Bible can address the areas in our life that need growth, areas in our life that we know where we need to be, we know where we should be, but we're not quite there yet. And as we address these four respective areas from Psalm 119 beginning in verse 33, you may walk away today saying, you know what, of those four, there's one that the Lord really used to impact me. You may say there's two. You may say there is four. And so what I want you to see is these respective constructs do not necessarily build upon one another as a narrative would, but we're going to see there are four very clear distinctive areas of which the Bible addresses how it and it alone can allow or bring growth in our lives.

Beginning verse 33, it says,

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. 34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart. 35 Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. 36 Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. 37 Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way. 38 Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear. 39 Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good. 40 Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

One of the things you'll discover throughout Psalm 119 is every one of the respective sections has eight verses apiece, and in this section, each of the two verses work somewhat independently of themselves. And so I want to walk through these four constructs today, again, one or more of these may actually apply into your respective life or possibly all four of them.

The first issue is the issue of desire. Now, we all know what that means, desire is our intent or our want to in a respective subject matter or area. How is it that the Bible can allow us to grow when it comes to our personal desires? Well, it begins in a very particular manner. It says, "Teach me, O God, the way of thy statutes." In other words, when it comes to our lack of desire for the person of God, for the things of God, it makes it clear that the way that we obtain that which is lacking is to seek or to want his statutes. Now, I borrowed this from a friend of mine, it is not original even unto him, but it's an old adage that rings true when it comes to our desire, the things of God. What we know is prayer, Bible study, even Christian fellowship, time alone with the Lord, those are so contrary to our flesh and we must desire those things for them to actually happen. And kind of an old adage a friend of mine gives is this, "If you're struggling with prayer, pray until you want to pray. If you're struggling with reading your Bible, read your Bible until you actually want to read your Bible. If you're struggling memorizing your respective chapter, keep memorizing until you actually want to." In other words, the desires of our heart when it comes to the things of God will not come naturally to our flesh. And notice what it says, "thy statutes." One thing you'll discover, the more time you spend with the Lord and the more time you spend in his word is how completely different and at times contrary his word is to every other piece of information that we are subjected to in this thing called life.

In Acts chapter 4, the disciples are making their way in those days of the early church. I mean, you think about it. It's been about a hundred days that Jesus went to Mount Calvary, shed his blood for the sins of humanity, and three days later rose from the grave. Instructed by him for 40 days, what we know as Pentecost took place, the Holy Spirit's descent, what we know as the manifestation of the early church began. It didn't take long before there was opposition, there were those who were contrary to, and when placed in the proverbial corner, they asked those early disciples, "Why is it that you have such desire? Why is it that you do what you do?" In Acts chapter 4 verse 12, I want you to

hear what the Bible says, "because neither is there salvation in any other name but the name of Jesus Christ." Our desire is particular because we realize there is the Lord and then there is everything else, there is the Bible and there is every other book.

And so what is our perspective? Notice what it says in verse 34. It says, "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." You know, Jesus oftentimes throughout his ministry was put in a conversation with those that were contrary to him, did not believe in him, and were absolutely opposed to him, and they tried to put him in those proverbial corners, so to speak. One day a lawyer comes up to Jesus, and he questions him. He says, "Jesus, when I go back to the Old Testament, particularly the law, the first five books, what's the most important thing? What's the key thing?" Remember what Jesus said? He said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart," not some of your heart, not part of your heart, not a great majority of your heart. In fact, we're reminded in Revelation chapter 3, that famous church known as Laodicea. The Laodicean church was what we call lukewarm. It was neither hot, it was neither cold and essentially what Jesus was saying is sometimes our lack of desire is because we have a foot in the word of God and another foot in the world, and when those things exist at the same time, you will always struggle, your heart is not completely in it.

Now, I have confessed this in days past, and I will share it again. My wife Tracy and I, we have kind of those movies in our marriage that, you know, anytime they come on, you just have to stop and watch. One of those movies, now it never received any nomination for an award, but it's called "The Replacements." If you're not familiar with "The Replacements," it is the movie, it's a story about something that, particularly on Super Bowl Sunday, is hard to imagine, professional athletes who are entitled and whining they don't make enough money. I know that's hard to believe but that's what the movie is about. And in the course of this movie, they decide to go on strike, and going on strike, they bring in a bunch of guys who never made it, a bunch of guys who always desired to play the game but never got to. They were the, quote, you guessed it, replacement players. Well, they're about getting ready for the very last game of the season and the star quarterback, two Super Bowl rings, been in all the famed celebrations and had trophies all over the wall, decides to, quote, cross the line and play in the last game. That quarterback, who'd waited his whole life for a chance, not only was benched, but he was at his house watching on TV. Well, the game didn't go as anybody desired. The team that the movie's based around was struggling and the interviewer, the sideline interviewer went to the coach at halftime, they're losing, and said, "What do you need? What do you need to win this game?" He said, "We need heart, miles and miles of heart."

Well, you know how this movie ends. That quarterback that was sitting on his boat watching the game traveled a few miles, put on a uniform, because he recognized in that movie what we need to recognize when it comes to our relationship with the Lord, your desire for the things of God can and should supersede your natural gravitation toward God. In other words, we all possess giftedness and talent and abilities and such but you know what you can't replace? Heart. You can't replace "want to." You cannot replace desire. And so for some of us, our struggle with God and our struggle with the things of God isn't our ability, isn't our capacity, but it's our "want to." It's our desire. It's our

willingness to say, "Okay God, instead of one foot in the word and one foot in the world, I'm gonna jump in both feet."

Sometimes it's desire and sometimes it's discipline. Now, I don't know about how the Lord wired you, but this is the one that I struggle with. Notice verse 25, "Make me to go in the path of your commandments." You know, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, at the end of the Apostle Paul's earthly life, he begins to reflect back on all the Lord has done over 30 plus years of ministry and travel and shipwrecks and being stoned halfway to death, and he makes this statement in verse 3. He says the Christian life is like the warfare of a warrior. He actually parallels our faith to that of a military endeavor. And I did not have the privilege of serving, I know many of you here in person and online did so, and we thank you for that, but one thing I've learned about those who serve in the military is that when it comes to an assignment, they don't give you a vote. True? They don't go to the platoon and say, "All right, we're going to take a vote. Who wants to take the hill? Who wants to stay here?" No, guess what happens? That which or whom is in charge gives the directive and it must be followed.

Now I would say probably the most readily illustration that we can understand, those of us in the civilian world who have never served in a military compassion, is some capacity of the athletic realm or the sports world because I don't know about your coaches growing up, but I never had one take a vote. Not one. In fact, I'd had coach once that, you know, they'd run these things at the end of practice where, you know, in basketball, you run the, you know, the lines of the court, football, you run 40, there's all kinds of different sports. I had one coach, he thought he was funny. He said, "Hey, practice strong to a close, how many of y'all wanna run wind sprints?" None of us raised our hands. He goes, "That's what I thought. Come on, let's do 20 of them." We didn't have a choice. We didn't have a vote. In other words, one of the problems that some of us have when it comes to our walk with the Lord is we want our opinion and our preference to supersede what he has said and we don't want to allow him to give the direction for our lives.

You know, when we think of discipline, when we think of doing that which another has instructed us, it doesn't come natural. It's not that which we're naturally inclined to. In fact, we have a natural tendency toward much the opposite. If you don't believe me, read Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve said, "You know what? We don't like the game plan, coach. We want to do what we want to do." It's a struggle. But notice in the next verse, verse 36, he says, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies," and the reason for that verse is it gives us a perspective that no matter how disciplined we might feel that we are or believe that we are, there is always room for growth.

You know, every now and then the Lord gives me a blessing, an opportunity to stand before athletic teams, variety of sports, variety of ages, variety of stages, but one of the things that I love the privilege of doing is standing before that team hours before a championship game. There's just something about a championship game that gets all of us all excited. One of the things that I communicate in that environment is this: championships are not won the week before the game. You know when championships

are won? During the off season when young men and young women are willing to come up and do that which is above and beyond and more than their respective opponents.

It says remove from me vanity. The book of Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 2, Solomon begins with these famous words, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." You read through the book of Ecclesiastes and basically what he says is this, that anything and everything that is not of God eventually burns up, dries up, and rusts up is what it does, and he says when you look through life, you discover at the end of life how futile it was. In fact, you get to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, I want to quote for you the very last verse of Ecclesiastes, everything will stand before in judgment to God. So think about that for just a moment. All of our endeavors, all of our energies, all of our passions, all the things of life, one day will literally crumble at the presence of the Lord himself.

Let me bring that back to the practicality of the sports world. Summer workouts, when it comes to a fall sport, nobody likes them. Okay? Spring sports, fall workout, nobody likes them. Here's the issue. I've been there and I'm sure some of you have been there. You're walking to the gym, you're walking to the field, whatever it may be, and this is a quote, elective workout. This is an extra workout. This is something I'm not necessarily required to do. My coach suggested it and I'm scared to tell him, no, but nonetheless I'm going to do it. And you see your friends get in the car laughing and playing. It's vanity because you realize going out with your buddies isn't going to help you win a championship. Let me pull that to the adult world. Do you know how hard it's becoming in this culture to actually go to church when we have so many options? Do you know how hard it is in this culture to pull away from the constant barrage of information and just sit alone with God? It's tough. It's difficult.

He says remove from me the vanity of life. See Isaiah chapter 53 summed it up best in verse 6. It says we like sheep, we've all gone astray. Hey, I know what it's like because I can be sitting there, just minding my own business, Bible out. Now, ladies, I don't know if this, you can identify, but guys, I know you will. Got my Bible out, I'm focused on the things of God. All it takes is one jingle from my phone. You ready? Da da da, da da da. That's the ESPN highlight. That's what that is. Oh, who won? It's real, isn't it?

Remove from me vanity, so many distractions. Discipline is staying there when you hear the jingle. Discipline is staying in there when you have a vain opportunity. You see, sometimes our struggle is desire, sometimes it's discipline, the next one's called discernment. Verse 37 says, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; establish words." In other words, there's this continuous thought, it began with this covenant, the desire of other things, it goes to vanity and all these things of our life, and what we decide is sometimes it's tough to discern what's the direction I should go? What's the direction I should not? What should I be a part of? What should I not be a part of? What should I embrace? What should I reject? And when it comes to the things of life that we should decide whether or not, as I mentioned earlier in Ecclesiastes, he makes it clear, everything in this life, one day, somehow, somewhere, will fall at the feet of God himself.

So how do we have the right perspective? 1 John chapter 4 verse 1, I love this verse. It says, "Test the spirits and see if they're of God." In other words, when it comes to the decisions of life, the discernment in life, how do I know in my perspective here, how do I know which direction to go, which path to take, which endeavor to embrace? Here's the beautiful thing, God has given us direction on discernment. How do we test the spirits? Many of you know in your respective fields, if you're asked to take a, quote, test whether something should be embraced or rejected, there are items that you utilize, there are procedures that you walk through. Guess what God said? He said, "I got this." In the book of Amos, chapter 7, listen to this. The Lord says when it comes to the struggles of life and deciding what you should or should not do, in Amos chapter 7, verse 7, he calls what we know as the Bible as the plumb-line of God. It gives us the discernment to know whether it should be or should not be embraced or an endeavor to go after.

Now when it comes to a plumb-line, I know today we are blessed with what we call lasers and modern technology, but at the end of the day it's just hard to do better than a heavy object on a string hanging from heaven above. It's just hard. Here's the thing about a plumb-line. If you've never utilized one in the quote, archaic sense, typically it is involving some type of item that you're hanging for display or you're constructing or building. You use a plumb-line to discover is it or is it not straight. Here's the problem with a plumb-line, a plumb-line will tell you that your eyes are wrong. I cannot tell you how many times I have hung a picture and said, that looks straight. You put a plumb-line up against it, it's not very straight. Here's the other thing about a plumb-line, people can tell you it's straight, you believe it's straight and a plumb-line will tell you it is not. I got another thing about a plumb-line, this goes so into our world today. You know what a plumb-line does not care about? Your feelings. "I feel that it's straight. I feel that it's right." What does a plumb-line do? A plumb-line establishes that no matter what it looks like, no matter what it sounds like, and no matter how you feel, it either is or it is not straight. And so, yes, we struggle with desire, yes, we struggle with discipline, but when it comes to discernment, there are all these things of life that are covetous and of vanity and it is the word of God alone, not what we see, not what we hear, not what we feel, that gives us that guide, that directive of what should be or should not be embraced, celebrated, promoted, advocated, or lived in our life.

Last but not least, the last two verses of the Psalm, this section, gives us an idea about destiny. It says, "Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good. Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness." Now what the Bible has done in Psalm 119 today is said this, that if we struggle with God with our desires, maybe we need to be more focused on the things of God and have our whole heart in it. When it comes to our discipline, it's putting our flesh to the side, our "want to's" aside and doing as he is instructed and how he's desired. When it comes to our discernment of life, it's about whatever his word says versus what it does not. But at the end of the day, whether we like or not like to address it, every one of us at some point is going to step out of this world into the next. We're going to walk out of the tangible and the material into what the world calls the afterlife. You know what the Bible calls it? Eternity.

And notice how particular it is here in verse 39, "Turn away my reproach." I know most of you are aware of this, but allow me to clarify, the Bible makes it very clear that not only, as I mentioned earlier, have we like sheep gone astray but all of us have sinned, all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. There is not a single one of us who can one day stand before a holy God as was described to that song today and say, "Yep, I'm worthy. I'm righteous." In fact, in Matthew chapter 25, there's this incredible picture and Jesus is communicating this on the Mount of Olives. He talks about a day that's coming where the Lord himself shall descend out of the heaven, establish his kingdom on the earth, and there's this fascinating picture in verse 41. He says, "Those who are on my right hands go into the kingdom prepared from the Father for everlasting. Those on my left hand descend into the lake of fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels." Can I give you some good news today? What we know in the Bible as hell was never created for you, it was never designed for you, you were never meant to spend one single moment there. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. What does it say in the second to last verse? "Turn away, reproach." It's very particular. It says when it comes to what comes next, basically there's this plea, "God, if at all possible, that's not where I want to spend eternity."

So then we get to the last verse, verse 40 says, "Behold, I've longed after thy precepts, quicken me, make me alive in thy righteousness." Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 says, we, humanity collectively and as a whole, we were dead in our sins and in our trespasses but he has quickened us to life everlasting. In other words, what we see in these last two verses is that if you would really be honest with yourself, we all deserve reproach, we all deserve judgment, and biblically speaking, there's not a one of us who does not deserve to descend into the devil's hell for all of eternity. But he, according to Romans 5:8, in his great love for us, Christ died for us. He that was without sin became sin so that his righteousness might be attributed to us.

One of the most frustrating things that I observe as a human being and as a pastor, is I meet people all day long, they have unquestionable desire, unparalleled discipline and unbelievable discernment, however, all of it is for the things and the matters of this world and they will literally end with their life, and we discover in these last two verses that all of us deserve and all of us are headed for reproach unless the Lord quicken us, unless he bring us the life that we cannot earn and we have none merit on our own. Many of us today struggle with our desire for the things of God. Many of us are struggling with discipline. Some of us are struggling with discernment. But is it possible there are some of you that are struggling with destiny? You're struggling with what's gonna come after that last breath. You're struggling with what's gonna come when I breathe my last breath. The Bible made it very clear that even though we are headed toward reproach, the Lord can turn it. He can quicken us. He can give us life. But notice it's not based on what we do, it's based on what he wrote. You know what he said? He said Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and nobody comes to the Father but by him.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed, that as we come to this time in our service, I know the Bible makes it very clear that it is the Spirit of God that must take the word of God to apply it unto and into our lives. And maybe today you're that person,

maybe you're that individual that as you heard those words read and as you heard them preached and described, you realized that there's never been a time in your life where you've called upon the Lord to save you. We talked about the veracity and the value of the word of God today, and Romans chapter 10 verse 13 says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Not whoever quote gets religion. It doesn't even say whoever is baptized or whoever joins a church. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord. Maybe today's that day where you realize you're headed toward reproach and you need to be quickened. It's not about reading a script. It's not about making sure you say the right words in the right order. It's a heart's cry, but maybe your heart's cry goes something like this. "God, today I realize much like your word said today, I've got a sin problem. I have lived a life that is contrary to you. I've been places I should have never been, done things I should have never taken part in, spoken words and had thoughts that are so contrary to you, and I believe what your word says, your Bible says the wages of my sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, today, I believe. I believe that I have a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. God, today, I believe Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today, I believe he paid the price for my sins on his cross and three days later, I believe he rose from the grave so my sin could be forgiven and my soul could be saved. God, today, I don't have all the answers to the issues, the struggles and the problems of life, but there's one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how, God, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today's that day where you cried out unto the Lord. In just a moment I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together. Maybe today's that day you cried out. We just invite you wherever you are just to step out and step forward. I'll be here. We'll have others as well. And we're here to celebrate with you. We're here to pray with you. We're here to pray over you. Or maybe today you say, "Pastor, I've already got that covered, but I saw those two in the baptistry. I've been struggling with that issue of obedience. I'd like to talk about that." We'd love to have that conversation. Or maybe today, like every Sunday, you're one of those that says, "You know what, this is our church home. How do we get planted? How do we get rooted?" We'd love to pray through that and see what that means. Or maybe today you say, "You know what, I'm just struggling." Maybe you're struggling with your desire for the Lord. Maybe you're struggling in the area of discipline. Maybe discernment is the furthest thing from your life. Maybe you just need somebody today to pray over you. We would love to be a part of that.

Lord Jesus, thank you, thank you that in spite of the misdirection of our lives, thank you in spite of the sidewaysness of our life, that, Lord, you've given us a plumb-line, you've given us the guide, you've given us the direction, and today in your word you made it very clear what we need to do in light of those respective situations. God, my prayer right now is that we wouldn't rationalize or justify what we would like to do but we would simply obey what you've called us to do. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.