

How Important is the Bible?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Alright, good evening First Baptist family. Well, it is Sunday evening and for those of you that maybe this is your very first time whether here in person or on the other side of the camera to be a part of our Sunday evening Bible study, as we continue to walk through a global pandemic and, by the way, I get questions each and every day, you know, what are we looking at as far as the future is concerned, what are our plans for this and for that, and we do have what we might call tentative aspirations, but I think we'd all testify things are kind of a day by day, hour by hour. I don't know about you, I'm just grateful and thankful that we have the technology that we do, so in the event that we are unable to or strongly discouraged from gathering again in person, we'll still have the availability of being online.

So that being said, Sunday evenings through at least this global pandemic, has been what I have just considered an all you can eat Bible study buffet and tonight we're gonna fall in line. We're gonna be tonight in Psalm 119 and so if you have a Bible available with you whether you're at home, the back porch, here in person with us, I don't want you to panic that Psalm 119 has 176 verses. Don't panic, we're not gonna go through each verse verse-by-verse and word-by-word, but tonight I want to ask a very important but what will appear to be a rhetorical question: how important is the Bible? Now I know that the majority of you here in person and on camera if I were to ask you that question and say on a scale of 1-10, how important is the Bible, I daresay none of you would probably put it at less than a 9.5. You would probably all, some of you would say it's an 11. I mean, it's that important. And that is true and as believers we technically would ascribe to that position of the value of the Bible but today we're gonna walk through Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, that isn't talking about the Bible, that's the subject matter thereof, and I want to address how important it is not just for us to affirm, not just for us to cerebrally agree with, but how important it is to our lives, our family, and yes, even our culture, and hopefully by the end of the message tonight you're gonna discover that a lot of the problems we're having in our world right now is because our culture does not value the Bible as they should, our society does not implement the Bible as it should, and I believe and I'm gonna go ahead and put the cart before the horse, I believe that if we were to again value the Scriptures and implement the Scriptures, a lot of the issues and the problems that we have today would cease to be. So how important is the Bible? We

all agree, at least mentally, that it is critical to our lives but we're gonna see in just a moment how truly important it is for everyday living and our society as a whole.

So tonight as we go to Psalm 119, I want to begin before I read a selected passage, I just want to begin with the distinctives of this passage. Psalm 119 is a very unique section in your Bible. This is the longest chapter in the Bible, bar none. Nothing else comes close. Now if you were to do a strict analysis, Psalms is not the longest book of the Bible but Psalm 119 is the longest chapter of the Bible. One thing I want to call your attention to if you have Psalm 119 open, you will notice that every now and then there is a break in the text and there is an odd looking symbol and a word that is difficult to pronounce. You'll see that. What that is is actually what we know as the Hebrew alphabet, and if you begin in Psalm 119, before verse 1 there is "Aleph." Then there is "Beth." Then there's "Gimel." Then there's "Dalet." There are 22 letters in what you and I know as the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 sections to what we know as Psalm 119.

Now this is vitally important for us to understand before we go into our study tonight. There is only one other place in your Bible that even attempts to do something of this magnitude and it is found in Proverbs 31. Now typically around Mother's Day and other celebrations we talk about a Proverbs 31 woman and rightfully so, but I think we would all also agree that Proverbs 31 is not just a picture of an individual woman and the godliness and righteousness thereof, but it also is a prophetic picture of what all of us are to be as the church, the body of Christ. As his bride, these are the attributes that we are to have. If you turn to Proverbs 31, some of your Bibles, very few of them, will actually have the Hebrew alphabet outside or beside the verses as well. Let me share with you what's happening there and then kind of unfold this for you. The only two places in your Bible where the Hebrew alphabet shows up is in Psalm 119 and in Proverbs 31. The difference in Proverbs 31 is that it was an addition to the margin of the text with what we collectively call the Masoretic text or the 12th century. The majority of your Bibles will not actually have those Hebrew letters out beside it.

You say, "Well, why is that important?" Two reasons. 1. The only two things in the entirety of the Old Testament that have the Hebrew alphabet out beside or within them are the bride and the word. That's it. Now think about that for our lives today. As the bride of Christ, according to Proverbs we are the apple of God's eye and it is the word of God that supplies us our marching orders or our direction for life, and so these are the only two things that are elevated to such status. Now you say, "Well, why is it so important that the Hebrew alphabet is there?" If you've ever done any type of study, if you've ever experienced or observed a Hebrew scribe in action, it is an amazing amazing experience. In fact, today one of the most guaranteed places that you can do so, if you so desire, is take a trip to what we know as the Holy Land, go to the top of Masada, there on the south side of the Dead Sea, and there's actually a place where a Hebrew scribe is in there every day taking the Old Testament scrolls and Scriptures and transcribing them.

Now the Hebrew language and the letters thereof were so critical and so precise that if a scribe made one very simple error, he was to destroy the entire page. That's how valued the language is and that's why when the Lord speaks whether it's Moses at the burning

bush, or the picture of Jesus being the Word of life, the words of God are critical. And so the only two things in your entire Old Testament that are given a status where the Hebrew alphabet is implemented is this godly woman of Proverbs 31, a prophetic picture also of the church, but it's in the margin, it's the subset, it's not even within the text. The only thing that is so elevated within the Old Testament to receive its sectioning by the Hebrew alphabet is a chapter on the Bible. Why is this important? In Psalm 138:2 it says that the words of the Lord are elevated above the name of God. Jesus Christ in Matthew 5, "heaven and earth will pass away, my words will never pass away."

Now I know we have somewhat of this discussion on a regular basis. You know, we know that all Scripture is inspired by God. We know that John 3 and Leviticus are of the same equal value and importance. I get that. But what if the Lord only gave you a couple of pages? What if the Lord said, "Okay, I'm only going to give you a couple of pages of the Bible. Those are the only ones that you can have." What would we choose? And I know we all have those passages that are near and dear to our heart but Psalm 119 needs to be toward the top of your list because within it, these 176 verses, there is everything we need to know about how to live life, how to make good decisions, and how to know the mind of God in the midst of a very godless culture and society.

So Psalm 119. I want to begin tonight, I'm only going to read the first two sections and that's gonna be very strategic because there are these descriptions or these definitions, shall I say, of the word of God that are utilized within these first two, obviously throughout the whole. It says,

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.
2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. 3 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. 4 Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. 5 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! 6 Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments. 7 I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. 8 I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly. 9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. 10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. 11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. 12 Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. 13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. 14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. 16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Now today as we walk through Psalm 119 kind of from an overview, kind of a 30,000 foot view, several things that I want to address and the first one is this: the definitions that the Bible gives itself for how we are to understand it, and specifically we have nine different terms that are utilized. For those of you that are here in-house, we'll have them on the screen. Obviously, hopefully those of you online will have access as well. These

are the definitions, these are the words that the Lord uses to define his word. First and foremost he calls it the way. This is the way of life. This is the way of understanding. Twenty-one times, that's what that number out to the side means, how many times does it actually used within Psalm 119.

Now think about what is the way. If somebody were to tell you, "How do I get to a certain location? What is the way to walk? What is the way to drive?" By definition a way is a method or a means by arriving at a destination or attaining one's goals. I find it interesting that when you get to Acts 9, remember the Apostle Paul, this was before he was Paul, he has letters to go to Damascus to not only capture but if necessary injure and take the life of these early Christians. We weren't called Christians in Acts 9, you know that, right? We weren't called Christians until Acts 11. But what does the Apostle Paul, I know he's Saul at the time, what does he refer to us as? People of the way. That is why during the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early '70s, there was a lot of music that was coming out and a lot of commentary and it talked about one way or the way, this return to the original designation. Why is that critical? Jesus said in John 14, "I am the way, the truth and the life; nobody comes to the Father but by me." So it begins in verse 1 talking about the fact that we are not to be, undefiled in the way, the path that we take, the goal that we aspire to, the journey that we're taking.

The second word that is utilized is a concept of testimony or one's testimony. Twenty-three times in Psalm 119 it says that the testimonies of your word or the testimonies of your law, the testimony therein. And think about one's testimony. In a context such as this, I know many times, in fact, just a couple of weeks ago at a men's event that we had, we had somebody stand up and give their testimony and what is a testimony? A testimony is a reflection of things gone by, it's a reflection of the current situation. It's where we're able to review our life and share what we've learned, share what we know, and to challenge us to learn therein.

One of my favorite texts in the Bible regarding the testimony is found in John 9. Those of you that are not familiar with that exact context, we have the man who was blind and the disciples question Jesus, "What sin did he commit? What did his parents commit? Why was he put in this situation?" And Jesus responds, "Oh, this was for the glory of the Lord." What do you see? Jesus touches him, he's able to see. He testifies to his parents. He testifies to the religious leaders. And he testifies to the community at large. You remember what his testimony was? "I used to be blind, a man named Jesus touched me, now I can see."

So a testimony tells us what was "wrong in the past, what is now right in the present, and the means by which we can get to that point." So when the Bible is referred to as the way, that's what guides us in the direction we should be going. When it claims it is our testimony, it tells us where we don't want to go and yet where we need to go. The idea of precepts. Twenty-one times this word is utilized. In fact, there's a very well-known Bible study that is strategic toward ladies called "A Precepts Bible Study." That's something that's been very well-known for recent decades. A precept is a command that is to be passed down to others whether that's our own biological children, whether that's people

of influence, people we work with, people we live next to, but simply put when it talks about the Bible is a precept, it is not for ourselves alone, it is to be impactful to those that are around us.

The fourth word that is used is commandments. Twenty-two times it talks about the word of God being the commandment of God. Now when we think about commandments, we think about the "Big 10," right? We think about the 10 Commandments that are found in Exodus 20. Why is this important? Because when it says that the Bible is a testimony, it shows us where we don't need to go versus where we do need to go. When it tells us it's a precept, we need to teach these truths to others. When it tells us that it is a commandment, it means it's not up for negotiation. These are not suggestions. These are not, "Well, if it feels right then you might consider, or if you're in the right mood." A commandment is a directive that is given that is not to be negotiated, not to be avoided, and not to be dismissed. And we talk about the famous 10 Commandments but according to Psalm 119, 22 times the Bible as a whole is referred to as the commandments of God.

The fifth definition or a word that's used is the law, the law of God, or the law of the Lord. It's actually used 25 times in this one chapter. It is a reference not just purely to Genesis through Deuteronomy, the first five books of the Bible that we call the law of Moses, the book of Moses, the Pentateuch of Moses, but that is the early establishment thereof. We get to the book of Galatians, remember what it says about the law? It is a schoolteacher, it is a schoolmaster to show us – this is what's critical – where our shortcomings are. The purpose of a law is not to tell you how good you've performed, but much the opposite. Allow me to illustrate. Now I know we're living in a global pandemic and our world is kind of topsy-turvy right now so just work with me. I've never seen anybody, you may have heard of it, I've never seen anybody in a speed zone of 55 get pulled over for doing 48, the police officer congratulate them on doing such a fine job of driving. No. That speed limit sign is there not to reward us or congratulate us for our obedience to it, but to warn us of the consequences if we violate it.

So oftentimes, you know, we hear people say negatively about the word "the law." It just sounds so negative. Well, on the flipside or on the contrary, the purpose of the law is to show us where we fall short, where we fail, and if we do not read the law of God we're gonna think we're right in our own eyes. And so it is a schoolteacher and obviously many of you are familiar that I'm the son of a schoolteacher, the son-in-law of a schoolteacher, and I'm the husband of a schoolteacher, and one of the things that I know about schoolteachers are this and anybody who is in education: their reason for giving a student a bad grade is not because they have something personally against them but to inspire them and motivate them and challenge them to learn the material so they can be proficient in the subject matter. So when the Bible is referred to as the law, one of the things you're gonna read and we alluded to this this morning in the Sermon on the Mount, there's a lot of areas where you go, "Wow, I fall short in that. That's not where I am yet." That's not there simply as a personal, I guess, agenda as much as an encouragement for us to strive to where we need to be.

Next, another word is called the judgments of God. Eighteen times in the book of Psalm 119, it says the word of God are the judgments of God. What is a judgment? It is rendering a verdict, making a declaration. These are the consequences thereof. These are the repercussions, whatever they may be. One of the things that people find most difficult within Scripture is there are times where decisions are made, actions are done, and we cannot reverse it, we cannot start it over.

You know, I have three teenage boys obviously in my home. You're all well aware of that. And they are part of a generation as many of your children and grandchildren are, that at some level participate in some type of video gaming for entertainment. Now I will say that my boys, they'd rather be outside throwing a football and tackling each other than they would inside but, you know, at times they do divert down that path. And one of the things that I've noticed is one of the things that they have the ability of and, by the way, a little proud dad moment, if you're gonna do a video game, at least be car racing. I mean, seriously. That's what they're doing. That if they're racing these cars on the video game and they don't like what they did, do you know there's actually mechanisms now they can reverse the video back up to the point where they messed up and then get it right. You do realize that's not real life, right? We don't have the capacity to do that. When a judgment is rendered, we can't go back in time. We can't go back and say, "Well, if I had to do it again, I would have done it this way." Why is that important? Because we see in the life of Esau, remember this man who gives up his birthright to his brother, Jacob. And I know it was somewhat by suspect means, but you know the book of Hebrews says he cried out to God, he begged to God to get his birthright back and the Lord said, "I'm sorry. It's already been given away."

So the judgments of God. The righteousness, that's what the Bible is called. Now this is an interesting term. It's only used four times in Psalm 119. Let me call your attention to verse 40. This is the first place in which it is used. It says, "Behold, I have longed after thy precepts," remember that's what we command or we pass on to others, "quicken me in thy righteousness." Interesting because it's only used four times and typically it is used in tandem with another word that is used to describe the Bible whether the precepts, the commandments, the way, whatever it may be, and by strict definition a righteous decision is one that has a proper balance. You know, in our Bible reading plan we're about to walk through what we know as the Proverbs and one of the things that you'll see over and over in the Proverbs is the Lord does not like, in fact, he despises an improper balance. He doesn't like when you fix the scale. He doesn't like when you manipulate the odds for your favor. Let it be what it is and let it work out, and that's what the righteousness is, and what is it saying to us there? That the Bible, it is what it is. And what do we try to do? I say "we" collectively. Humanity has this really bad habit of trying to reword the Bible or redirect and say, "Well, it doesn't really mean that." Well, when it's called the righteousness of God, what the Bible is saying is it really does mean what it really does say. It is a proper balance. It may not be culturally relevant, it may not be politically correct, but it is what it is and every generation whether in the Western or the Eastern hemisphere, it doesn't matter, every generation tries to work their culture around the Scriptures but it is righteousness.

Next, the statutes. Statutes, 22 times this word is used to define or describe God's word. It is a fixed ordinance. In other words, we get the root word of a statue. Most statues are large and heavy and almost impossible to move and the same is with the word of God. It is a fixed item. It cannot be altered. It cannot be changed. It cannot be twisted. You have the opportunity and this is what a lot of people have done with the Bible in recent days, you can decorate the statue, you can distract from the statue, you can build things around it that are even bigger than the statue but it does not remove the statue from its place. And the word of God, the Bible for years and years and years people have done their best to try to, shall we say, redecorate it or to redefine it but it cannot be moved.

And last but not least, word or words, plural. Now it sounds kind of redundant to say the word of God is called the word of God but it is. It is the words of God. It is the word of God twice as much as any other term. This is utilized 43 times. In 176 verses, this is referred to as the word of God or the words of God. Why is that important to our understanding of the Bible and its importance? Because people who have a heart toward God or people who want to know the things of God have a unique way of, shall we say, attaining their information from God. We live in a world where people want to have dreams, they want to have some type of existential experience, people want to have a certain means of communication. I don't know about you but how many of you wish at times that God would just write it in the clouds? It'd be a lot easier.

In fact, I will tell you a humorous story. One of the books that I have in my office, hopefully you'll find this humorous, it's called "Bible and Handgun in Pocket," and it is a history of how the Gospel went Westward in the early 1800s here in America, and it just gives these humorous antidotes and humorous stories of individuals and pastors and circuit riders and how different churches and denominations got started. It's just one of those history books that's kind of lighthearted and somewhat humorous. There's actually a story in there that's supposedly is verified that there was a young man, a young man who was a farmhand, in fact, he was working in the cotton field and he was taking a mid-afternoon break and he was just kind of collecting his thoughts and he's laying down and he's looking at the sky. And there in the clouds, you know how you look in the clouds sometimes you can see images, he saw what appeared to be the letter G, P and C, and he took that as, "Go preach Christ. That's what God's called me to do." So he went down to the local church, went down to his pastor, a man, "God's called me to ministry. I was laying on my back, I was taking a break. It was as clear as day. It was in the clouds, 'Go preach Christ.'" And so they had a time for him to answer some questions and he got up to preach what in the old days we called a trial sermon. Many of y'all remember those old days. And he got up and preached and let's just say it didn't go real well and one of the older, more mature men in the congregation came up to him and said, "You thought it meant, 'Go preach Christ,' it meant and said, 'Go pick cotton,' is what it may have meant." We're looking for clouds, we're looking for dreams, we're looking for existential experiences, the funny thing is we spend a lot of time in humanity trying to hear God when he has given us his words.

Now, guys, I'm gonna pick on us for just a moment. We collectively, the male gender, we do not speak as many words as the female gender does and sometimes that's good, but

sometimes it gets us in trouble, does it not? I don't know if you've ever experienced this in your home or within relationships where we asked or we're encouraged, "Just talk to me." And sometimes, guys, can we confess we've already used all our words for the day? I mean, we're done. We as humanity do best when we talk with each other. That's why in Matthew 18 it says if a brother has sinned against you, go and talk to him. Let's discuss this. You do realize that we are God's creation. He wants to talk to us. He wants to communicate with us and we don't have to worry about clouds in the sky or having some kind of weird experience, he has given us his words.

Now the reason that I ended with that term or that definition is because I think it encapsulates everything about what the Bible is. It is God verbally communicating to us his way and his will in our lives and I want to challenge us even before we get to the next part, I daresay there's not an issue, a situation, a problem, or a struggle in life that the Bible doesn't address. It does at some level. Now it may not be specific with, you know, how do you deal with a middle child? I mean, that may not be necessarily specific but there are stories within the Bible that we can go to and we can discover their context and they give us wisdom and precepts etc.

So those are just the words that the Bible uses to define itself. Now the second thing we've got to deal with here are how does the Bible describe its impact or its description for our life. Now this is where we could go for hours and this evening I have just selected six very what we would call salient verses. These are those verses that when you see them or you hear them, you know them. Maybe you have them memorized, hopefully you do.

I'm gonna begin in verse 9 of Psalm 119. It says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word." A young man, a young woman, humanity in general. If we want our lives to be better, if we want our lives to be pure, if we want our lives to be holy, if we want our life to be pleasing to God, how do I do that? What do I need to do? According to this we need to take heed to his words. The Bible talks about relationships, the Bible talks about money, the Bible talks about friendships, the Bible talks about doing business. The Bible talks about all kinds of concepts that young people and not so young people deal with each and every day of their life. And so if we want to cleanse our ways, if we want to know that our interactions with others and our behaviors are "right and pure in God's eyes," then we have got to confirm it with what God has said. I cannot tell you how many times I've had people come up to me and say, "Well, I know the Bible says this but this is what I want to do." Well, don't expect a clean life. Don't expect a pure life. Don't expect God to "bless" your life. You know, it's interesting we have a "bestselling" book called "Your Best Life Now," I wonder when we're gonna write "Our Blessed Life Now"? You know I can write that book in one sentence, just do what the Bible says. That is your "blessed life."

So how do we keep our way clean? How do we keep it pure? We make sure that every decision, every word, and every action can be ascribed to, defended by, and is aligned with the word of God. Two verses down, verse 11. I'm sure many of you are familiar with this. It says, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." If you

are tired of sin or if you're exhausted of sin or if you don't want to participate in sin, the antidote is to put the word of God into your heart and into your life.

Now I can share with you because I've been walking with the Lord almost 40 years now, I fall or, well, I do fall technically but I have opportunities for temptation, we all do, correct? You know, maybe it's a decision to be made, a word to be spoken, a response. You know, it's interesting that the more that I memorize the word of God, the more those verses come to mind in the heat of battle. They just immediately come to me. Why? Because the Holy Spirit within me wants my life to be clean. He wants my life to be pure. And so if I'm thinking about, headed in the wrong direction, what does he do? He brings his word to my mind so that I will not sin against God. If you do not place the word of God in your heart, then you don't have any ammunition. You don't have any. You say, "Well, what does the Bible say? Or how should I respond? Or what should I do in this situation?" It says that we hide his word in our heart so we would not sin against him.

I, like probably some or many of you, as a young child was a part of Bible drill or sword drill, and I know of way too many people who memorized just so that their mom or dad or grandparents would be happy with them. You know there's a difference between memorizing and it being in your heart. I mean, I can recount things from a cerebral perspective but when it's in your heart, you not only have it memorized but it guides you and it directs you in your life. "I have hid your word in my heart so I would not sin against thee."

A few more verses to the right in verse 19 it says, "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me." How does the Bible describe itself? If you would adhere to its commandments, specifically in this verse, if you hide it in your heart, if it is your direction for life, I've got news for you, you're gonna be a stranger in the earth. You're going to be a stranger in the earth. A knowledge of and a practice of the word of God will make you strange, odd and peculiar to this world. One of the best litmus tests or the best barometers that you can give yourself in life is how you line up with the world. If you watch a lot of the programming, you read a lot of the news lines and you are fitting right in with what everybody is selling, you might want to look at verse 19 again. Are you a stranger in the earth? One of the best compliments that the Holy Spirit can give you in your life is that you can be watching the news, you can be in a certain environment and the Lord just bring up within you, "You don't fit in here." Why? Because we are called to be strangers. In fact, 1 Peter talks about we are peculiar people. We are different people and one of the things the Bible describes itself as not only will it keep us from sinning against God by hiding it in our heart, it will cause us to be strangers in the earth. Now I've got to go ahead and give a little corollary here. If you want to be popular, well-thought of and a part of the mainstream, then don't read the Bible and don't apply it to your life. We'll talk about that here in just a moment.

Fast forward to verse 89. Now again we're not gonna go through all 176 verses. I could get really excited here. But in verse 89, a description of the Bible. It says, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." Now that one single solitary verse could be about a six or seven week sermon series but I'll deal with it for just a few moments. You and I

live in a world where everybody wants to change, alter, correct or adapt the Bible for our culture and for our lives. It may not be settled in academia but it's settled in heaven. It may not be settled in your peer group but it is settled in heaven.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard of people who were having Bible studies whether in their homes, even at churches, and this has been for years not just specific to recent days, where they talk about a lot of their Bible studies, they spend more time arguing about what it actually says than actually how to apply it to their lives because down deep we really question, "Is it really settled? Is it really established?" Or is it malleable and can it be manipulated, can it be twisted. According to this it is settled in heaven.

Now it's interesting because when you get to Revelation 11:19, that famous ark of the covenant, you know, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," and Indiana Jones? It talks about the testimonies, the ark being in heaven. Why is that important? Have you ever been in a discussion/argument with somebody, somebody gets really upset with you and you make this statement, "Don't get upset with me. I'm just the messenger." Well, this is what verse 89 does for us. When we speak the truth of God's word or when we say, "I'm gonna go this way versus that way," and the world gets upset with us because we're strangers therein, we're just the messenger. God has settled this in heaven. We didn't write it. We didn't preserve it. All we're simply doing is communicating and he is the one that's settled it.

Moving a few verses to the right, verse 100. It says, "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." Now you know there's a difference between intellect and wisdom. Intellect is a vast collection of knowledge, information, able to regurgitate, able to recall. Wisdom is knowing what to do with what you've got. I know a lot of people who are not intellects that are wise and I know some intellects that are not wise because they don't know what to do with what they've got. Here it says in verse 100, "I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." What the Bible's speaking of is wisdom. In fact, all throughout Proverbs it says the beginning of knowledge or the wisdom of God is the beginning of knowledge, and the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. One of the things that we understand is if you want to have the wisdom of the ages, how to respond in this situation, how do I advise in this context, the Bible is the source of what to know and how to communicate and what to share and communicate. Now that means that you do not have to have any type of formal higher education to dispense biblical wisdom. I know a lot of guys and I'm gonna throw the rock through the window because I can, I know a lot of guys with theological education that aren't worth a hill of salt. I know folks who have never formally had any type of "Bible training" who not only speak truth, they live truth, and they challenge others with truth. You can know more than the ancients. Now I know this kind of goes without saying, but some of the great thinkers of days gone by whether it be the Plato, the Socrates, whoever it may be, you realize if you digest the word of God according to the word of God, you are wise than them. By the way, the majority of them did not have a relationship with the Lord and actually rejected the things of God.

One more verse just a few down. I'm sure you're familiar with this, verse 105, "Thy word is a lamp unto feet, and it is a light unto my path." I know we've heard that and hopefully you've memorized it and you've quoted it throughout the years, but it's a wonderful description because Jesus in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount taught us to pray the famous Lord's Prayer, and I'm reminded of this regularly, particularly as we're walking through a global pandemic, "Give us this month our monthly life." No, "Give us this day our daily bread." I think one of the hardest things to do not just as a human being but as a believer in Jesus Christ is to live day by day. What does the book of James talk about? Oh, men, they store up for the future and they make plans for the days ahead and rarely does it come to fruition.

I've got kind of a Meyerism that says men's best plans are rarely half-realized. You don't believe me? Talk to a football coach. You've got a game plan laid out, you know what to expect until all of a sudden somebody does something you didn't expect and you've got to change everything. You talk to somebody with a military background and they'll say the best laid battle plans go away with the first shot that's fired. Isn't that kind of like life today?

It says it is a lamp unto our feet, it is a light unto our path. What does the Bible promise us? Will it show us what's gonna necessarily happen in six months or nine months in our life? No, but it will show us what we need to do today and that is why when we talk about the value and the importance of the Bible, it needs to be a part of our daily life, not just our weekly, our monthly, every now and then life, because every day we wake up, we've got a new path, a new journey, a new decision, a new whatever and we need the lamp for today for the next step.

You know, in my personal experience I've known more people to get in trouble not by being too far behind God but being too far ahead of God. They make a decision ahead of God's timetable. In other words, they outran the light. I'm sure you've all been camping at some level with friends, kids, whatever it may be, and somebody gets brazen and decides to outrun the flashlight. You know what they typically stumble upon, right? A snake. Because that light shows you what is ahead, you get ahead of the light and you're gonna get in trouble. Now what happens if you're too far behind? Then you're in the same mess, just a different perspective.

Well, as we kind of close tonight, I want to talk about the dangers. What are the dangers in life if we do not make the Bible important in our life? I know we've kind of alluded to some of them but what are the struggles we're gonna have? What are the difficulties? And I want you to think about your own life but I also want you to take a step back and I want you to think about our society. Think about our culture. Think about civilization as a whole. Think about humanity, some of the decisions that are being made, some of the consequences thereof, and what would it look like if we actually implemented the Bible into the equation. Now I'm not foolish to think enough that it will actually take place, okay? But what if it did?

I'm gonna go back to verse 10. Again, I'm just gonna walk through a series of verses here just with some issues. What are some dangers? Verse 10, it says, "With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments." Do you know what will happen in life if you don't live according to the word of God? You will just wander. You'll just wander around. You'll go from this, to that. You won't have a clear path. You won't have a clear direction. You will simply wander. Do we have a society that is wandering today? Absolutely. It doesn't matter, what do we do? Our society today typically pays attention to the loudest voice. Whoever is the loudest, they just like sheep, they just wander to that voice. And then the next voice, and then the next voice. But what do we discover? John 10 Jesus said he's the good shepherd but there is a hireling, and then later on he says, "My sheep know my voice."

One of the most fascinating things I've ever seen in my life and if I call this by an improper term, please forgive me in advance. I love and I have seen it several times what I would call visually impaired baseball or blind baseball where the bases have beacons to where the players can actually hear where they're supposed to run. If you've never observed it, it is amazing and here's why, because if you've ever been to one of these ballgames, there's lots of people that are cheering and shouting and you would think that they would wander off but what are they listening for? They're listening for that beacon that is in that base, and they have been trained to run to that base, ignoring – listen to this – all the other voices. We've become a culture that just whatever is the loudest voice, we just wander around and we end up wherever it is, but what have we seen that the Bible, the precepts, the commandments? That is that beacon in our life.

Fast forward to verse 16. It says, "I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word." We have become a culture that has forgotten the words of God. In fact, we've forgotten it so much when people quote it, they oftentimes misquote it because they don't even know what it says. It has become that which is – listen – it is etched on our buildings of government but it does not come off our lips anymore. One of the greatest journeys you can ever take is just go to the buildings of old particularly in Washington, DC and our ancient universities. Almost all of them consistently have Scripture engraved on their buildings and yet that is not what is advocated, it's not what's promoted, it's not what is taught. There is a danger in forgetting the Scriptures. Why? Because you forget that beacon, you forget that anchor, you forget that statute, you forget that commandment that holds your life together.

This is where it's gonna get real relevant. Fast forward to verse 43. I promise I won't go all night. I get excited about it. "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments." Phew, anybody else struggling with hope nowadays? I'm being serious. Our society, our culture, our world is becoming hopeless, is it not? Do we truly have hope that change will come? Do we truly have hope that this will happen or that will occur? According to what we just read, when we forsake the Bible we lose hope in our life, and I have to give myself the antidote of this on a daily basis because when I read the news and I watch the news and I hear what's going on, it presents hopelessness. It truly does. The only way we're gonna find hope is by reading the word of God.

Now you know that I love the end of the Bible. I love the book of Revelation. I love what we call eschatology. Let me tell you why: because in the end he wins. That's the hope I've got that when all this mess goes completely sideways, Jesus Christ is the one who wins. Jesus Christ is the one who has the victory. And he is the one that will allow me the privilege because of his blood of eternity in a place called heaven for all of eternity. If you find yourself in a position with a lack of hope, according to what we just read in verse 43, go back to the Bible, it will bring us hope.

Verse 53, it says, "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law." Wickedness abounds in our lives because we forsake the word of God. You want to know why we have a wicked society, a wicked culture, wicked people? It's because they don't do what the Bible says. Plain and simple, that's what it is. You will never see a news story that is wicked and vile where you say, "Well, they were just doing what the Bible says." No! It is much the opposite. So if we've forgotten the words of God, if we've neglected the words of God, and we have a hopeless culture, guess what we're gonna produce? A wicked culture. People do what they do because they don't have that beacon, they don't have that statute, they don't have that law, they don't have that way, whatever it may be. The wickedness of our culture is a necessary byproduct of a Bible-less culture. End of story. I promise you if we started living according to the Bible, we would have less people in jail, more marriages together, and less tension in our culture. And for everybody who wants to challenge me, could we at least just try it? I mean, we're trying everything else, why could we not try that? Well, that's a whole other story.

Verse 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." When we keep the word of God in our life – hear me out – it keeps us from straying from the things of God and the person of God. In fact, in 1 John 2, it says that within all of us is this desire, this covetousness, this desire to go contrary to God and what happens? We're enticed by the world around us. What keeps us from straying? It is the word of God. That's what keeps us from going down that wicked path. That's what keeps us from going down that unrighteous path. If you've experienced and I have personally, if you've ever experienced an animal, particularly a dog that has strayed off or "run away," why did that happen? Because the bounds of their life were left open. That's why we have cattle gates. Those of you who have worked cattle, you have cattle gates so that when the fences are open the cattle won't get out because they will simply just stray away and they will get out. What is the purpose of the Bible? It's to allow us not to stray.

Fast forward for the sake of time, verse 92. Verse 92 says, "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction." An ignorant and a neglect of the Bible in our lives leads to a culture of death. Never ever will you see anybody take the word of God, do the word of God, and follow, "Hey, I'm gonna do this according to the Bible, watch this." We know what that statement means, "Hey, guys, watch this." Usually it's death and destruction that immediately follows therein. What are the words of God? They are life unto us. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. What does the enemy do? Steal, kill, destroy. Death is his means, his mechanism. The Bible actually will keep you from death.

Now hear me clearly, I know that Job 14:5 says all a man's days are in the Lord's hands, but I want to offer you a challenge and this is not a difficult challenge, I want you to observe somebody you know that you would deem living a godly life, a righteous life, making decisions in life that we would subscribe to Scripture, and then go find somebody who doesn't of the same biological age and see how they age. Have you ever had one of those things particularly with celebrities where they'll show a picture from recent days and you're like, "Woo, woo, what happened to them?" You know, it's rare that those individuals we call celebrities live a godly biblical lifestyle, right? And yet you take someone who stays within the commandments, stays according to the precepts, allows their life to be according to what the Bible says, and I've got news for you: when you do life according to the Bible, then death is prevented, not just accidental but our life, the process of aging. I've had people time after time, particularly some of our more seasoned folks, when I reveal to them what their actual biological age is they say, "I would have never guessed they would have been that old." Why? Because a godly life leads to better aging. Do you know how many billions of dollars we spend on antiaging products in our culture? I've got an...

Or a position on truth. You've heard me say it before, I'll say it again, it's sarcastic: don't let the facts get in the way of your personal agenda. That's the world we live in today. We don't know who to trust. This group, that group. This personality, that personality. This source, that source. What does it say here in verse 4? That when we uphold his precepts, we hate every false way. I've got bad news for you: if you start digesting the word of God on a regular basis with good intent, you'll end up despising almost all the secular information that you receive because you're gonna discover at some level it's all false. It's just an amount of how much of it is.

Verse 118, moving forward just a little bit. It says, "Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood." You realize that a lifestyle according to God's word will keep you from the judgments of God. Case in point: Goshen. Remember the Old Testament? The Israelites and God is utilizing 10 major plagues on the land of Egypt. The water turns to blood. There's flies. There's lice. There's boils. There's all kinds of things with one exception: the land of Goshen. The land of Goshen was this geographical place, almost a garden of Eden type thing that when the Lord brought his judgment it didn't happen in Goshen. You know what the Bible says? That not only the Israelites but some of the God-fearing Egyptians went to Goshen. They got smart and said, "Maybe we ought to go there." Let me challenge you: your home out to be a Goshen. Our church ought to be a Goshen. You know our community can be a Goshen, right? This can be a place when the rest of the economies fall apart, ours will stay stable. This can be a place where everybody else is experiencing whatever it may be, that we don't if we, according to this, are true to the words of God. The judgments of God, we can avert them by a life that is based on the word of God.

Alright, verse 165. This is one of those good concluding things and we'll get to the last point here. It's gonna be fun. "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." Woo, do we live in a world where everybody's getting offended by everything. We've got people getting offended because they're not offended enough. I

mean, this is a world of everybody wants their feelings recognized. Everybody's getting offended. What does it say here? They have great peace that abide by your law, nothing shall offend them. Rarely rarely in our culture and society will you find somebody, at least today, who's not offended by something or multiple things. In fact, if somebody brings up one of these very tension filled issues and says, "Well, how do you feel about it?" And you say, "Well, I'm not offended." They get offended that you're not offended. I mean, everybody is sitting on political correctness eggshells today but according to the Bible, we're not gonna get offended.

So you understand that you don't have to live with that mentality in your life where everything bothers you and offends you and upsets you because according to this the law of God, nothing shall offend them. Why do we have wickedness abounding? Why do we have death abounding? Why do we have people taking offense to everything? It's real simple, folks, because we do not have the Bible as a guide for people's individual lives, their family's life, our culture's life. We don't have it anymore. We have become a biblically ignorant culture and I want to challenge us, we can't change the White House and we can't change this house and that house, but we can change our house, and so I want to conclude tonight with a decision that has to be made. It's real simple. Are we gonna do it God's way or some other way? I know you expect to hear that from me. Are we gonna do it the Bible's way or are we gonna do it some other's way? That's easy to amen and to affirm in this place at this time, but it's hard when you enter a conversation where somebody's offended or where wickedness abounds, or you're asked to defend or celebrate wickedness. That's where it gets a little bit tough so we have to ask ourselves a question: are we truly going to allow the Bible to script our life or the news, or the political correctness of the world, or the personalities of the world?

I know that I will never have this opportunity nor will anybody ever take me up on it, but I would love to do an experiment. In fact, we could even make it a closed experiment. What would happen if a culture, if a city, if a community in spite of all that's happened in the world, what if they just said for the next X number of days we're just gonna do it according to the Bible and see what happens. I'd make you a promise: there'd be less wickedness, there'd be less death, there'd be more life, and not a whole lot of people would be getting offended about stuff that offends everybody nowadays. Now that's kind of a world I'd enjoy living in. You know, that's why the Bible says there is hope in the word of God because we live in a hopeless hopeless world.

You know, at the end of the day in John 1, listen to what it says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and full of truth." I do not find it coincidental or accidental that in the Gospel of John Jesus Christ describes himself as the Word of God. Everything that we've talked about for our lives and for our culture can only be found in Jesus Christ. We're looking for it in political aspirations, we're looking for it in laws and ordinances, we're looking for it in mandates, whatever it may be, at the end of the day it is Jesus Christ who is the only one that can really give us what we're searching for and what we want and I want to challenge us, I know it's Sunday evening and this is kind of the hometown crowd inside and I don't know what's on the other side of the camera, but maybe you're that person who said, "You know what? I've tried everything else, I might

as well give Jesus a try. I've tried everything else, I might as well try the Bible." Let me challenge you today.

I'm gonna close with one final story and I know when a preacher says that, that means there's two. There's only actually one. Several years ago in another state, another church, I had a man who was probably in his early 50s, he came up to me and he says, "Jeff," he says, "do you think the Bible is really right about that tithing stuff? I mean, when the Bible says that when we give the Lord, that he protects us?" He said, "You really think the Bible is right there?" I said, "Absolutely." He said, "I'm gonna put the Bible to the test." And I got to thinking to myself, "Okay, I don't normally want to test God but according to Malachi 3, that's okay in this subject matter, alright?" He says, "Test me. Try me. Do this." And so he said, "Here's what I'm gonna do," now this was his words, not mine. I didn't come up with the idea, it was his. He said, "I'm going to tithe for a year and just see what God does." I said, "Alright, friend, that's your decision. This is between you and God." I'll never forget it. About a year later he came back to me, he was so excited. He said, "Jeff," he said, "you're not gonna believe this." Of course, I was. He said, "Did you know you can get a tax deduction for giving?" I said, "Yeah, I know that." He said, "Did you know...." And he began to talk about, he goes, "You're not gonna believe this." He said, "I actually did better financially by giving to God than by not giving to God." I said, "I know that." He said, "I tell you what, you ever meet anybody else who struggles with giving, you send them to me and I'm gonna talk them into it."

Now why do I share that hopefully humorous impactful story? It's because that's an issue that deals with dollars and cents and do we really believe that living on 90% can be better for us than living on 100%? It sounds backwards, does it not? That's what the Bible says. Jesus said if you'll give your life to him, he will take care of you, he will provide for you. In other words, it's always, it always works his way, it rarely works our way.