

## **How to Avoid Wasting the Message of Psalm 119 (v. 169-176)**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on April 5, 2009*

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Ezekiel 33:30-32 (NKJV) <sup>30</sup>“As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, ‘Please **come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.**’ <sup>31</sup>So they come to you as people do, they sit before you **as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain.** <sup>32</sup>Indeed you *are* to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for **they hear your words, but they do not do them.**

As we come to this final section in Psalm 119, I have to confess I am sad to leave this study which has blessed and encouraged my heart as much or more than any study I’ve ever done. And as we leave this Mount Everest of the Psalms, this zenith of the glory and greatness and sufficiency and supremacy of Scripture, I’m also sad because if this study in Psalm 119 hasn’t changed you, I don’t know what will. I am sad to think like the prophet said that many of you have come to hear the Word from the Lord, sitting here as God’s people many weeks, hearing the Word, but not doing it. With mouths professing Christianity but hearts pursue your own gain. The message is interesting, maybe your ears even like it as spectators listening to music. But a song doesn’t demand anything of you and when it’s done . . . some of you walk out unchanged. God’s Word requires that you change your life in response, or you are deceiving yourself, James 1:22 says. If you let it, today’s message can change your life. On the back of your note sheet, I want to encourage all of you to look at this and study further on your own.

### ***HOW TO LISTEN TO GOD’S MESSAGE (from Nehemiah 8):***

1. With desire for the Word – “bring the book” (Neh. 8:1)
2. With attentive hearts (Neh. 8:3)
3. With reverence (Neh. 8:4-5)
4. With worship (Neh. 8:6)
5. With the whole person engaged and responsive (Neh. 8:9-12)
6. With preparation and hunger to learn (Neh. 8:13)
7. With eager and immediate application and obedience (8:14-17)
8. With daily continuing in the Word (Neh. 8:18)
9. With repentance and confession of sins the Word reveals (9:1-4)

For further development of these points, go to [www.goldcountrybaptist.org](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org) and choose “Read Sermons” or “Listen to Sermons” and choose this title dated 6/10/07

### ***“How to Listen to a Sermon,” by George Whitefield (1714-1770)***

1. Come to hear them, not out of curiosity, but from a sincere desire to know and do your duty.
2. Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God.
3. Do not entertain even the least prejudice against the minister.
4. Be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or think more highly of him than you ought to think.
5. Make particular application to your own hearts of everything that is delivered.
6. Pray to the Lord, before, during, and after every sermon.

Psalm 119:169-176 (NASB95) <sup>169</sup> Let my cry come before You, O LORD; Give me understanding according to Your word. <sup>170</sup> Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word. <sup>171</sup> Let my lips utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes. <sup>172</sup> Let my tongue sing of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness. <sup>173</sup> Let Your hand be ready to help me, For I have chosen Your precepts. <sup>174</sup> I long for Your salvation, O LORD, And Your law is my delight. <sup>175</sup> Let my soul live that it may praise You, And let Your ordinances help me. <sup>176</sup> I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

TITLE: How to Avoid Wasting the Message of Psalm 119

OUTLINE (for this passage and really any message you hear):

1. Think Differently (v. 169)
2. Speak Differently (v. 170-72)
3. Live Differently (v. 173)
4. Read Differently (v. 174)
5. Pray Differently (v. 175-76)

### 1. Think Differently (v. 169)

It all starts here. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Our thinking must change so that it will then affect our whole being, heart, mind, etc. Biblical transformation is by the renewing of our mind – the more we think biblically the more we then live differently.

<sup>169</sup>**Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word.**

The constant cry of this man of God for help was not the things we think of first and most to pray for. He had the insight to know that his great need was biblical insight, teaching, understanding. This is a man who thought differently than most of us, than even many believers. This man processed all of the trials and struggles of life in this psalm in his life through a God-ward lens, a God-centered worldview, a God-oriented perspective. His great need and great request through difficult times was for more biblical discernment from God's Word to know how to apply God's Word more. This understanding is not mere information, but is for transformation:

<sup>27</sup>Make me understand ... so I will meditate [*meditation=key to transformation*]

<sup>34</sup>Give me understanding, **that I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart.**

<sup>144b</sup> ... Give me understanding **that I may live.**

He asks for understanding so he can obey Scripture. This is biblical understanding so he can live it out – applied biblical knowledge. The evidence that a man has wisdom is that he asks for God's wisdom rather than the so many things less mature believers pray for. This godly man's thinking was not consumed with the lesser things so many are consumed with – he knew his great need was his mind to be continually renewed by God's truth, which is one of the things that stands out in this psalm (he prays “teach me” 10x, “give me understanding” 5x, etc.). If this psalm has had any effect on us, let it be the effect of what our mind values above all else, which should be to know and live the truths of the Word of God.

The more you know the Bible the more you know how little you really know. The more you learn of God's Word, the more you realize how much you still have to learn. A man of understanding will recognize his continual need for understanding more and more from God's Word.

The word “understanding” is often translated “discernment.” This last section of the psalm begins with a *cry for discernment* in a world that doesn’t even *care for discernment*.

Proverbs 2:3-9 (NASB95) <sup>3</sup> For **if you cry for discernment**, Lift your voice for understanding ... <sup>5</sup> **Then you will discern the fear of the LORD** And discover the knowledge of God. <sup>6</sup> For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding ... <sup>9</sup> **Then you will discern righteousness and justice And equity and every good course.**

The whole book of Proverbs begins this way:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: **To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,**

When God gave Solomon the choice of one wish for whatever he could have, Solomon correctly asked for this as his greatest need, discernment / wisdom. When people ask how they can pray for me, this is almost always first what I ask pray for. This biblical word from our text for “discernment” has been defined as the learned *skill of understanding and applying God’s Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong.*<sup>1</sup>

Jay Adams says one isn’t ‘supposed to just pray for discernment and wait until it suddenly strikes him out of the blue. No, he is to pray for it to come from his study of God’s Word. Too many want wisdom, discernment, and knowledge handed to them on a silver platter. It doesn’t come that way. These things come through the disciplined, regular study and application of the Scriptures to life’s circumstances. And usually, that is only “by reason of practice” in interpreting and utilizing biblical teaching’<sup>2</sup>

Hebrews 5:14 (NASB95) “the mature ... because of practice have **their senses trained to discern good and evil.**”

## 2. Speak Differently (v. 170-72)

John Bunyan has been described as one who studied the Bible “till his whole being was saturated with Scripture ... his writings ... continually make us feel and say, 'Why, this man is a living Bible!' Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak with out quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God." As you read writers like him, they just speak differently, so biblically.

This man of God in Psalm 119 not only thinks differently, but as a result he speaks differently to God and to others about God / Word

<sup>170</sup> Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word.

The petitions “give me understanding” and “deliver me” go hand-in-hand, because the poet is one who is persecuted for the sake of his faith, and is just as much in need of the fortifying of his faith as of deliverance from the outward restraint that is put upon him.<sup>3</sup>

Both verses 169 and 170 have the language of his request coming “before you,” which was language that could be used of worship by sacrifice, or one coming into the very close presence of the Lord by a way of access, coming before the throne of God above.

Spurgeon describes these prayers as requests ‘that it may be in his ear, under his notice, and looked upon with his acceptance. Yea, he goes further, and entreats, ““Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord””: he wants the Lord’s attention to his prayer to be very close and considerate. He uses a figure of speech and personifies his prayer. We may picture his prayer as Esther, venturing into the royal presence, entreating an audience, and begging to find favor in the sight of the blessed and only [King]. It is a very sweet thing to a suppliant when he knows of a surety that his prayer has obtained audience, when it has trodden the sea of glass before the throne, and has come even to the footstool of the glorious seat around which heaven and earth adore. It is to *Jehovah* that this prayer is expressed with trembling earnestness — our translators, filled with holy reverence, translate the word, ““O Lord.”” We crave audience of none else, for we have confidence in none beside.’<sup>4</sup>

SUPPLICATION – is an OT term for “prayer of grace.”

DELIVER ME – one has described this word as a rescue, like taking prey out of an animal’s mouth. It’s basic physical idea is “drawing out or pulling out,” or in some cases, “take away,” or “snatch away,” – deliver, rescue, save, either earthly or eternally.

ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD – not by my will or my desires or in my way, but in your will and way, consistent with the Word.

<sup>171</sup> Let my lips utter praise, For You teach me Your statutes.

“LIPS UTTER” – the word can mean “bubbling up of a spring, pouring forth, gushing” – he wants his lips to gush forth praise that comes from the spring of his heart, pouring forth the overflow from deep within. Like the geyser Old Faithful, he wants to gush out his praise regularly to the heavens for all to see His abounding praise from earth to heaven His abounding of His always faithful God. When God teaches us something from His Word (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the verse) our lips should utter praise, and at times we should even utter praise while God’s teaching is going forth by saying Amen!

<sup>172</sup> Let my tongue sing of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.

If you have the KJV/NKJV, it says “speak” instead of “sing,” a word that it usually translates as “answer.” Either way, the point is clear, that God’s Word affects what comes out of our mouth. The Word-saturated man like Bunyan will speak differently, we should be walking Bibles. You barely have to poke us and something from the Bible should come out, verses from the Word should come out as naturally as things from the world used to come out, whether speaking or singing, Scripture is on our lips (171) and tongue (172)

The beautiful picture of the godly wife in Proverbs 31 says:

<sup>26</sup>She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue

God’s Word should always impact how we speak, as Ephesians 5 says in the context of marriage and home and at work we should be

<sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Colossians 3:16-17 says those same effects are natural results of the Word of Christ richly dwelling in us with all wisdom.

We should speak so differently than the world and the way we used to as a result of God's Word that others in the world will ask what make us different, what's the reason for the hope within us?

I've been going through the life of Jonathan Edwards by Marsden, and one of the things recorded in the writings of the great spiritual awakenings and movements of God in the early colonies was that the people *spoke differently*; they spoke of spiritual things so often rather than superficial things of the world with fellow Christians.

- Why not talk to people right after the service of spiritual things from the text, instead of things of little importance?
- Invite someone over from church you don't know as well and as part of your time, share what God is doing in your life and what you're learning and ask how you can pray.
- Get together for coffee or breakfast with a brother or sister with the express purpose of spiritual conversations or even get a book to go through together and discuss things that challenged you in it (see "recommended reading" site)

### 3. Live Differently (v. 173)

<sup>173</sup> Let Your hand be ready to help me, For I have chosen Your precepts.

As dependent as he is on God's help and grace in the first half of the verse, there still is a choice he must make in his growth as a believer (2<sup>nd</sup> half). Salvation is all of God and sovereign grace and none of human effort as Romans 9 says "it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy." But *sanctification* (the process of Christian growth) requires human effort and our will and our running the race set before us, with the mercy and grace of God empowering us. God still gets all the glory and credit and is still sovereign in both, but man's responsibility is equally emphasized in this verse: "*I have chosen.*"

Joshua 24: "*choose you this day whom you will serve.*"

Jesus said to Martha, "*Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the good part*" – the part of listening to the Lord and His Word.

Some who emphasize God's sovereignty aren't as comfortable with statements like "I have chosen to obey" or "I have decided to follow," because it seems to minimize sovereignty or dependence on God, but Psalm 119 has dozens of such statements of decisions and determination and dedication, and we need to let Scripture stand with its equal emphasis on human responsibility. It's true Romans 3 doesn't say we have *ability* in our fallen humanity to do good, choose God, seek God, etc., but as redeemed humanity *we must do so* by God's grace which enables us from our new heart. But this is not "let go and let God" – do nothing, just be passive. We actively *get going and lean on God* in equal measure.

<sup>30</sup> **I have chosen** the faithful way; **I have placed** Your ordinances *before me*. <sup>31</sup> **I cling to** Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! <sup>32</sup> **I shall run** the way of Your commandments, **For You will enlarge my heart**.

There's no question in the context of this psalm this man utterly depended on God to enable his heart to do all these things, and there's also no question he made deliberate efforts to choose and run and cling to the Word and place it always before himself.

In v. 173 he speaks of God's "hand" which in OT can stand symbolically for a person's power or strength, like God helping the needy (Ps 80:17, 139:10) or punishing the wicked (32:4, Isa 5:25).

Colossians 1:29 (NASB95) <sup>29</sup>For this purpose also **I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.**

As we've been learning in the Discipleship / Counseling class, this process on our part is labor, "holy sweat" as the Puritans called it, it's hard work but it's not mere human work, it's God's within us.

Adams writes: 'don't fail to note that obedience is a choice. [Even a believer won't automatically or] naturally do God's will. He must determine to do so. It is a choice in which it is necessary to move out in obedience asking God to help as you do. The verse does not recommend sitting around waiting for some sort of strength or wisdom from God before acting. Rather, it [is] making the right choice and, as he goes forward in obedience, asking for God's personal assistance. The strength often comes in the doing.'<sup>5</sup>

Sitting down and hearing God's Word or reading God's Word is self-deception, according to God's Word, if you are not asking "how should we then live?" as Francis Schaeffer asked. Godly living is not by osmosis -- sitting through a sermon without applying it doesn't change us (at least not for the better). Don't leave this study in Psalm 119 without asking how you should live differently as a result. Read through and study this Psalm again – all the notes of everything I've said in my messages are on the website if you want to study further or you can listen to them there.

Ezra 7:10 *Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it*

#### **4. Read Differently (v. 174)**

<sup>174</sup>I long for Your salvation, O Lord, And Your law is my delight.

One writer says: 'Although his distress was exceedingly acute and although he had no guarantee in hand on how or when his LORD might act on his behalf, the man of God was still drawing refreshment out of the unfathomable well of the Word of God.'<sup>6</sup>

"Your salvation, O Lord" is *Yeshua YHWH* – very similar to the meaning of the name Jesus, which is "Yahweh saves." This longing for salvation that OT saints had, to whatever degree they understood it fully or not, is fulfilled ultimately and finally in the person and work of the Messiah Jesus Christ (*Yeshua ha Meshia*).

I hope that one of the ways I can help us read differently is to see how Christ-centered and Christ-focused this book is, including the OT which Jesus fulfills and which He told the disciples on the Road to Emmaus that there are things concerning Himself in all the OT Scriptures. The whole Bible is the Word of Christ, pointing forward to Christ in the Old, and looking back at His finished and sufficient work of salvation in the New.

This verse says “your law is my delight.” In last week’s text he said 3x he loved God’s law and he says the same thing repeatedly in this psalm, which may sound strange to some of your ears. Who would ever write a love poem to a law? But that’s what Ps 119 is.

Leon Morris comments: ‘Christians today often think of the law as a burdensome restriction, but that was not the way the psalmist responded to it. To him the law was God’s loving gift meant to guide his people in the right way, and the psalmist welcomed it, exulted in it, and loved it.’<sup>7</sup> Law is actually a gracious blessing. It didn’t make anyone saved, but it did make them safe / protected.

This word law/*Torah* originally referred to the first 5 books written by Moses (“Pentateuch”) but it later took on a broader meaning for all God’s teaching and instruction. When this psalm was written, it’s possible the writer only had access to the Law books at that time - still he greatly loved and rejoiced in them. How much more should we love and rejoice in this Book now that we have its fullness and the glorious gospel of grace and the rest of the story?!

And we should love all of God’s Word not just our favorite parts or top few NT books.

- We are not OT Israelites bound by Mosaic Law today in its civil codes unique to the theocratic kingdom in the land.
- We’re not under its ceremonial laws (diet, circumcision, etc.), sacrificial laws -- Christ fulfilled the system of sacrifice on the cross and the veil of the temple was torn in two on the old covenant.
- But Paul who understood that and preached that himself still said he loved and delighted in God’s law joyfully (Rom. 7:22).
- And he taught God’s moral law still has relevance today, in pagan unbelievers convicting them within of God’s law written on their hearts (2:14-17), and for believers it reveals our sin, too (Rom 7:7).
- Though the Law cannot save, Rom. 3:31 says “*Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary we establish the law.*”
- Being saved by grace does not make the Lord’s commands irrelevant or optional for Christians. Paul rebukes in Rom. 6 as emphatically those who want to say we can disobey and sin because “we’re under grace, not under law.”
- 1 John 5:3 says those who truly love God “keep / obey His commandments [present tense ongoing pattern of life; the difference is] **His commandments are not burdensome.**”
- We can also love them because they are for our good – we can even love reading Exodus –Deuteronomy because it reveals the character of the Lord we love.

Some of us need to read differently by seeking to love / delight more in the parts we don’t know as well, because all is inspired / profitable, etc. Vs. 174: “*Your law is my delight*” (intensive plural)

### 5. Pray Differently (v. 175-76)

<sup>175</sup>Let my soul live that it may praise You, And let Your ordinances help me.

This verse recognizes our reason for living is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Praise involves both and one of the ways we should pray differently in Psalm 119 is by praising God more. His desire for living here is not personal comfort, but praise to God!

The final verse of this Grand Canyon of the Psalms does not end on a high note on the other side, but in a low and dark valley:

<sup>176</sup>I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

This somewhat surprising closing line is Ps 119's longest / biggest verse, but the writer speaks of himself as small, vulnerable, in the valley of shadows, exposed to enemies, feeling lost like sheep not knowing where to find rest or shelter if left to his own wanderings.

After 175 verses of some of the loftiest language of a man as in love with God and His Word as seems humanly possible, this mature believer, perhaps towards the end of his life, knows he hasn't arrived and is not even close, still in utter need of the Lord.

*"not that I've already attained it, but I push on ..." "wretched man that I am, who will deliver me ... thanks be to Jesus!"*

Thanks be to Jesus the Good Shepherd we can pray to: "seek me."

A mature believer will sin less than before but will be more aware of and convicted of his sin than ever before. Many commentators point to these truths: "love of Scripture ... need not harden into academic pride. This man would have taken his stance not with the self-congratulating Pharisee of the parable, but with the publican who stood afar off, but went home justified."<sup>8</sup>

'the child of God may be seen exerting himself but is never observed trusting himself.

Remembering that the school days of a disciple are never over in this life ... the child of God is to keep on growing in the grace and knowledge of his LORD. As he indeed does mature and evidence real growth verified by measurable patterns of consistency (e.g. v. 110), at the same time, he keeps on rising to new vistas provided by the Word of God from which he gains progressively even more insight into the sufficiencies of God, and correspondingly, the insufficiencies of self.'<sup>9</sup>

*If you think you stand firm, take heed lest you fall*

'During the spiritual journey recorded in this psalm, the psalmist had experienced his ups and downs, but he had always stayed himself on the Word of God, and he did this to the very end. He opened the psalm with a benediction (v. 1), but he closed it with a warning, and both are important to the balanced Christian life. God gives us promises and assurances so we will not despair, but He gives us warnings that we might not presume ... [a true sheep could] not stray for long. The Good Shepherd would find him and lead him back to the fold. He would anoint his wounds with healing oil and give him a long refreshing drink of water (23:5).<sup>10</sup>

The poets and song-writers jump in her as well:

*You know the way to bring me back, My fallen spirit to restore  
Oh, for Your truth and mercy's sake Forgive, and bid me sin no more  
The ruins of my soul repair And make my heart a house of prayer... Though like a sheep  
estranged I stray Yet I have not renounced Your way  
Your hand extend, Your own reclaim,  
Grant me to live and praise Your name<sup>11</sup>*

Watts:

*My soul hath gone too far astray, My feet too often slip;  
Yet since I've not forgot thy way, Restore thy wand'ring sheep.*

*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love,  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above*

Psalm 119:10 (NASB95) <sup>10</sup>With all my heart I have sought You; **Do not let me wander** from Your commandments.  
<sup>11</sup>Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.

A lost sheep needs a lamp for his feet and a light to his path to find his way back. And verse 105 says that is found by God's Word. *This Psalm should cause us to pray differently as wandering sheep.* The more you see the perfections of Scripture, the more you should realize your imperfections. The greater the glimpse of the Holy God in His Holy Word, the more we recognize how unholy we are. When God-centered, this doesn't lead to depression but to dependence. When like this verse you do not forget God's Word even in the darkest valleys, and you pray "seek me" – Jesus will.

Those who are true believers are still always sheep prone to get lost. They are sheep that belong to the Good Shepherd, but that doesn't change the fact that they are sheep that can easily get away from the fold and need the rod and the staff to comfort.

Ezekiel 34:11-16 (NASB95) <sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. <sup>12</sup>"As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. <sup>13</sup>"I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. <sup>14</sup>"I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>"I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup>"I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick ...

The good news is that true sheep of Jesus hear His voice and will not be lost utterly but will repent and be brought back.

- *We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us turned to his own way but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isa. 53:6)

- *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.* (1 Pet 2:25)

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep

- When one out of 100 is lost He goes after that one and personally brings it back on His shoulders to the tune of great joy in heaven

- Jesus seeks and saves the lost and His sheep He has the power to keep and none of His elect precious sheep will ever be lost, He said

What a wonderful Savior we have! What a wonderful Shepherd He is!

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- 1 Tim Challies, *The Disciple of Spiritual Discernment*, p. 61.
  - 2 Jay Adams, *Counsel from Psalm 119*, p. 136.
  - 3 Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (2002). *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (5:xii-748). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
  - 4 Charles Haddon Spurgeon. *The Golden Alphabet - Spurgeon's Exposition of Psalm 119* (Ps 119:169-76).
  - 5 Adams, p. 138
  - 6 Zemek, 380.
  - 7 Morris, *Testaments of Love*, p. 49.
  - 8 Kidner, p. 429.
  - 9 Zemek, 382.
  - 10 Wiersbe, *Be exultant*, p. 141.
  - 11 Lockyer, 612-613.