

“Words and Creative Communication”**Psalm 119; Proverbs 10, 12, 18**

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What a privilege it is for me to be able to deliver a message on “Words and Creative Communication.” I believe that we can all agree that the ultimate source of written communication is the Bible which is God’s book and God’s voice. Max Lucado refers to it as a “peculiar book. It contains words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people.”

When you think of it in that way, it’s surprising that anyone reads it. It’s too old to be relevant to our modern times. Some of its writings date back 5,000 years. It’s too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible floods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called Himself God’s Son. Logic says this book should not have survived. It is too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed at, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings and rulers have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over its grave has been dug, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, but it has been the bestselling book in the world for years!

The most unusual monument I have ever seen is the Book-Burning Memorial, called “Empty Bookshelves.” It is located in a public square in the center of Berlin, Germany. A glass plate, set into the cobblestones of the square, allows passers-by to peer into a sunken library. There are enough shelves in the underground library to hold 20,000 books, but the shelves are empty.

“Empty Bookshelves” is a reminder that on May 10, 1933 twenty thousand so-called “un-German” books went up in flames in this spot under the direction of the Nazis. Thousands more including Bibles and Torah scrolls would be burned during the next decade. You may have heard about the inscription there that when translated into English means, “That was but a prelude; where they burn books, they will ultimately also burn people.” My reaction to this monument was –Those who burn God’s word need to fear being burned.

There is no way on earth to explain it; which is perhaps the only explanation—for the Bible’s durability is not found on earth but in heaven. The millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises know there is but one answer: the Bible is God’s Word and the Voice of God.

Let’s turn our attention to Psalm 119—a most remarkable psalm that displays God’s glory. This is the longest psalm and chapter in the Bible. The author is unnamed. Some commentators say it is a psalm of David, composed throughout his entire life. Other commentators believe it is from the days of Nehemiah or Ezra. No matter who the author was, it was likely written over some period of time.

Since this is a psalm glorifying God and His Word, it refers to Scripture over and over again. It is remarkable for how often it refers to God’s written revelation, His Word, which is referred to in almost every verse. Scripture is mentioned in at least 171 of the 176 verses according to David Guzik in his commentary, “Enduring Word.”

Guzik also shares the story of George Wishart who was the Bishop of Edinburgh in the 17th century. Wishart was condemned to death for his faith. But when he was on the scaffold, he made use of a custom that allowed the condemned person to choose one psalm to be sung, and he wisely chose Psalm 119. Before two-thirds of the psalm had been sung, his pardon arrived and his life was spared.

Psalm 119 is a beautiful Hebrew poem arranged in an acrostic pattern. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and this psalm contains 22 paragraphs which are units of 8 verses each. Each of the 22 sections is given a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter.

In this psalm, the composer expresses his incredible love for the Word of God. He wrote: “Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.” Don’t miss this next statement: “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.” (Psalm 119:97-100)

When you read this psalm, you will discover that in almost every single verse of all 176 verses, there is a synonym for the Word of God. There are at least

eight (8) of them—God’s law, testimony, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, ordinances.

Dr. David Jeremiah addresses how we should respond to God’s Word in his message “The Priority of a Devoted Mind.” The Bible says we are to “walk in it, seek it, look into it, learn it, take heed of it, hide it in our heart, rejoice in it, meditate on it, contemplate it, don’t forget it, strengthen ourselves to receive it, get the understanding of it, incline our heart to it, be revived in it, remember it, be taught from it, consider it, direct our steps according to it, and glean understanding from it.

In fact, we are to feed on God’s Word. In verse 43, the psalmist implores the Lord to “Never take Your Word of truth from my mouth for I have put my hope in Your laws.” In Matthew 4:4, Jesus said, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” God’s Word will nourish us and motivate us to live for Him each day. I am convinced that we learn to love the Lord with all of our mind when we feed on God’s Word.

The Bible is the treasure map that leads to our highest treasure—eternal life. In Max Lucado’s words, “The Bible is not a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried.” So let’s roll up our sleeves and examine some of the treasure that lies within God’s Word as we take a closer look at this glorious psalm that emphasizes the grandeur of God’s Word.

Verses 1-3 “Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,
Who walk according to the law of the Lord.
Blessed are those who keep His statutes
And seek Him with all their heart—
They do no wrong
But follow His ways.”

The word, “blessed,” means “happy.” If you want to be happy, walk in the Word of God. It will really be a delight to you. Let’s be honest, the television shows or movies we watch often leave us empty, while time spent in the Word of God will bring sustained satisfaction to your soul.

Verse 7 “I will praise you with an upright heart
As I learn your righteous laws.”

Sometimes we feel limited or inhibited in our ability to praise. We can learn the language of praise by repeating the phrases in the psalms.

Verses 9-11 “How can a young person stay on the path of purity?
By living according to Your Word.
I seek You with all my heart;
do not let me stray from Your commands.
I have hidden Your Word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.”

The psalmist says one can get rid of these youthful sins, these tendencies of one’s flesh by paying close attention to the Word. Jon Courson suggests “Let the Word of God, which is likened to water (Ephesians 5:26), flood your soul and cleanse you constantly.”

I love verse 11 that hiding God’s Word in our heart is a deterrent from sin and should inspire us to memorize Scripture. It is important to put God’s Word into action as the guide for everything we do.

Verse 15 “I meditate on Your precepts
And consider Your ways.”

Sometimes, we hear people say, “I just don’t know what the Lord is doing”—as if He owes them an explanation. I’m afraid we have a tendency to not give God the respect that we should especially as I hear the thoughts and consider the actions of our teenagers. I believe that the lack of spending consistent time in His Word is a cause of this. In fact, I ask myself how many times have I hurried through my People of the Word lesson in order to get it done and missed the glory of God’s written Word?”

Verse 24 “Your statutes are my delight;
They are my counselors.”

People will often spare no expense for a half hour of counseling: and yet, the greatest counsel we can ever receive is found in the pages of Scripture. There is no better counsel than the Spirit of God speaking through the Word of God.

Verse 42 “then I can answer anyone who taunts me,
For I trust in Your word.”

Jon Courson shared a story of a young man who is said to have asked C. H. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, how to defend the Bible. Spurgeon said, “Son, how do you defend a lion? You just let it out of its cage and it will defend itself.”

If you memorize Scripture this week, I believe that within the week, the Lord will give you opportunity to use it with someone. Someone will have a question for you, and you'll have just the verse to share.

Verse 48 "I reach out for Your commands, which I love,
That I may meditate on your decrees.
and

Verse 54 "Your decrees are the theme of my song
Wherever I lodge."

Let me ask you this question...As you meditate on God's Word, do you ever find yourselves with hands raised in surrender, in submission, in adoration? Has the Word ever become so real to you that you found yourself singing spiritual songs?

Verse 71 "It was good for me to be afflicted
So that I might learn Your decrees."

So often, people turn to the Bible only when they are going through challenging times, or experiencing tribulation or affliction. When things are going well, people have no reason to turn to Jesus. It's when difficulties and illnesses arise that people cannot fix on their own that they seek supernatural help from God and they make time to open up the Book.

C. S. Lewis stated, "We can ignore even pleasure. Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Verse 74 "May those who fear You rejoice when they see me,
For I have put my hope in Your Word."

"Those who love the Lord will be glad when they see me coming," the psalmist says. How I love to be around people who can discuss the things of the Word. Isn't that one of the reasons we love coming to People of the Word?

Verse 98 "Your commands are always with me
And make me wiser than my enemies."

Continually studying the Word made the psalmist wiser than his enemies. An example of this was seen recently when a policeman in Haifa, a port city in Israel, was chasing smugglers who were using a cart pulled by a couple of donkeys. As the story goes, when the smugglers saw the policeman in pursuit,

they realized they didn't have a chance, so they jumped off the cart and escaped. Very devout in his study of Scripture, the policeman devised a plan. He didn't feed the donkeys for three days, then let them go because, from Isaiah 1:3, which says 'the donkey knows his master's crib,' he knew that the donkeys would lead him to the home of their master—which they did.

Verse 104 "I gain understanding from Your precepts;
Therefore I hate every wrong path."

My mom was a bank teller and she once told me that tellers are able to spot counterfeit bills by handling so many real bills that when a fake is slipped in, he or she can see and feel the difference. One of the best things we can do in regard to cults or when people use Scripture incorrectly is to know the Word so that when something is said that is contrary to Scripture, it won't sound right or feel right.

Verse 105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."

I feel that this is one of the verses that "I cut my eye teeth on." It became even more important to me as I grew older. Maybe that is true of you as well. I love the Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith song entitled "Thy Word" that was based on this song. The psalmist vows to use God's Word to shine a light on his path. He is saying that God's Word helps him to understand right from wrong as he faces choices each day.

Verse 130 "The unfolding of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple."

Aren't we glad that the Word wasn't written so that a person had to be an intellectual giant to understand it? You might say, "But I don't understand a lot of what is in the Word." Neither do I. In fact, the more I learn, the more I realize how much more I have to learn. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just act on what you do understand. I love the People of the Word format because when we gather in small groups we can share our perspectives on God's Word. In the larger assembly, we receive further enlightenment from the lecture. I know the lecturers all pray that they are being guided by the Holy Spirit when they prepare their presentations.

Verse 136 "Streams of tears flow from my eyes,
For Your law is not obeyed."

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul speaks of those who ignore the commandments of God. They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. The more I read the Word, the more compassion I feel for those who don't know the Word because they are missing out on so much wisdom and guidance--so much insight and comfort.

Verse 153 "Look on My suffering and deliver me,
For I have not forgotten Your law."

"Abide in Me," Jesus said, "If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (John 15:7). One of the secrets of prayer is to pray the Scriptures. James says we do not have because we do not ask God. And when we ask and do not receive, it is because we ask with wrong motives (4:2, 3). Many of our prayers are never answered because we don't pray in accordance with Scripture. If you want an effective prayer life, pray the Word.

Verse 176 "I have strayed like a lost sheep.
Seek Your servant,
For I have not forgotten Your commands."

"Lord, I feel far from You," the psalmist prays. "Seek me and draw me near for I have not forgotten the precepts, the commandments, the promises You have given me." I challenge you to pray this prayer when you are feeling distant from the Lord and see what He will do.

I encourage you to go through Psalm 119 beyond what was required in this lesson. Let it motivate you to spend time in God's matchless written Word. One of the lessons we learn from Scripture is that human language is an awesome gift from God and that we should never underestimate its power. I am amazed with the fact that God thought of everything as He created humans including the way we communicate with one another. We take for granted the system of language that we use every day. We have already examined the importance of our receptive language as we receive meaning from listening and reading.

Expressive language was also high on the list of human needs. Our great God also created a way for us to express ourselves through speaking and writing. We are born into a world of language and we usually forget what a miracle that is. We are made in the image of God, the master communicator, who teaches us the power of language.

With this perspective, we turn our focus to the teachings God gave us in the Book of Proverbs about the importance of speech. It has the ability to lead others to knowledge, and to bring healing in relationships. Speech can also be destructive when used recklessly or harshly. Words are powerful and must be weighed carefully by both the speaker and the listener.

Many of the proverbs indicate the value of this divine gift that we take for granted. Wise words are compared to gold and silver. According to Proverbs 25:11-12, “A word spoken at the right time is like gold apples in silver settings. A wise correction to a receptive ear is like a gold ring or an ornament of gold.”

Words are also like refreshing water. “The mouth of a righteous man is a well (fountain) of life” (Proverbs 10:11). “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook” (Proverbs 18:4). When we listen to and appropriate the words of a godly person, it’s like taking a drink of refreshing water.

Proverbs is filled with verses that contrast the righteous person with the wicked. Words can be used as weapons to hurt others or as tools to build others up. Here are the words of Solomon that reveal the effects of our words when we speak words of truth and love and the decimating results for those who communicate with deceitful and slanderous speech.

10:11 “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

10:20 “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.”

10:21 “The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of sense.”

10:31 “From the mouth of the righteous comes the fruit of wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be silenced.”

10:32 “The lips of the righteous know what finds favor, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse.”

12:6 “The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them.”

12:13 “An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous man escapes trouble.”

12:17 “An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.”

12:18 “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

12:19 “Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

12:22 “The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in people who are trustworthy.”

The following two verses illustrate the fact that our speech has consequences:

18:20 “From the fruit of a man’s mouth his stomach is filled; with the harvest of their lips they are satisfied.”

18:21 “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

Let us be people whose speech delights the Lord.

I have learned important lessons from this week’s lesson and I hope that they will resonate with you as well.

1) Let us be people who understand the power of our words. Let us speak truth and love and be guided by the Holy Spirit to bring glory to God in our conversations each day.

2) It is so important for us to read and study—even feed on God’s written Word. We have a huge responsibility to pass along the words of Scripture to our loved ones. God wants His Word to permeate every household and to penetrate every heart. He wants our culture and lifestyle to revolve around His Word. He wants us to make the Bible as common in conversation as the weather, sports, and daily news, and certainly in our teaching. If you want to make Scripture a more natural part of your household culture, the transformation begins with you regardless of your position in the family.

3) Sometimes we feel limited or inhibited in our ability to praise God. As we continue to study the psalms, we have a wonderful opportunity to practice the language of praise by repeating the phrases of the psalms in our prayers. This will certainly enhance our time of worship to our Lord as we become more fluent in the vocabulary of praise. In Jon Courson’s words, “If you do this, the Book of Psalms will become a wonderful part of your devotional life.” In addition, we have some glorious lyrics in hymns and current faith-based songs that come directly

from God's Word. I am sure that when the Lord hears our voice lifted up to praise Him that He is pleased. I am humbled by my lack of praise when I read the words of the psalmist who shared, "Seven times a day I praise you..." (Psalm 119:165).

4) Finally, I want to encourage you to engage in the discipline of memorizing Scripture. I am actually surprised that I have become convinced of the importance of memorizing God's Word through this week's study. I am the first one to say, "I have a really difficult time memorizing Bible verses; so, I really don't try anymore."

I can no longer take that position as I read Scriptures such as Proverbs 22:17-18 which clearly encourage Scripture memorization:

"Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your mind to my knowledge;
For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,
That they may be ready on your lips."

As I talk with friends and acquaintances and search for a particular verse to illustrate a point, I oftentimes know the content of the verse to which I am trying to refer, but I fumble with my words because they are not "ready on my lips." I challenge you, and especially me, to consider memorizing at least one verse a week. Here are a few strategies to support your effort:

- Start by memorizing verses that particularly speak to you. Why not start with the People of the Word Memory Verse each week by using these strategies?
- Write the verse(s) you want to memorize on 3x5-inch cards, pack them around with you—and before you know it, you'll have a heart full of the Word and a life that reflects it. Say the verse repeatedly throughout the day. Repetition is the key.
- Write the first letter of each word in the verse of the back of the card and repeat the verse by just using the first letters of the word to bring each word of the verse to mind. For example, JCITSYATAF. H13:8= "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Let it remind you of the verse until you no longer need that aid.
- Use the verse you memorized in prayer, in conversations with people, in correspondences, and in your teaching. Use your memorized verses with

your children or your spouse. God will bless your life and theirs as they see His Word bringing out the best in you. Isaiah 55:10-11 promises:

“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return to it there without watering the earth
And making it bud and flourish,
So that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater;
So is My word that goes from My mouth:
It will not return to Me empty,
But will accomplish what I desire,
And achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

I truly believe you will never regret the time you invest in hiding God’s Word in your heart.

Let me share this closing thought...What better time is there than “valentine season” to thank God for His Word which is His love letter to us?

Let’s pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many gifts you have given us -- especially Your Word. Open our eyes to it and guide us to obey it. Help us to “hide Your Word in our hearts” so that in the moments when we are under pressure that Your Word will come to us. Guide us to pass along our love for You and Your Word to those we encounter in our lives through Your wonderful gift of communication. Let us use our words wisely and well to honor you. Let us truly be People of the Word! Amen

Please stand and sing the Doxology.

