

## INTRODUCTION

Often times, there are pros and cons to an issue depending on your perspective. For example, we can say laws are restrictive because they forbid people to do whatever they want. However, laws are also protective because people cannot do whatever they want. Recently, I read an article about the strangest laws in every state of America. In Alabama, people are not allowed to wrestle with a bear. Hanging of clothes inside a car is forbidden in Delaware. For those who do not like shower they should stay away from Kentucky because the state law there requires people to bathe at least once a year. Finally, in Vermont it is illegal to tie a giraffe to a telephone pole.

While men's laws like those sound strange God's law is full of wisdom. Psalm 119 is an example. This psalm is not only the longest psalm in the Bible, it is also the longest chapter. It belongs to the category of acrostic psalm. There are 22 sections of 8 verses, for a total of 176 verses. Each verse in a section begins with the same Hebrew alphabet. For example, if you imagine that the psalm was written in English the first word in the 8 verses of section 1 would begin with the letter A. Then the first word of the next section would begin with the letter B, and so on. Last year, in the Living Water (English) service Pastor Manning spent a series of sermons to study the whole psalm. For the sake of time we will only cover the first 16 verses of it. If you read the whole psalm in one breath it would be hard for you to miss the central theme of it - the Word of God. Of the 176 verses only 5 of them do not have a reference to God's Word. In this Psalm the author used 10 different words to denote God's Word. Each word highlights one particular aspect of God's Word. All 10 of them appear in the 16 verses that we will study today.

I will briefly introduce these 10 expressions. My purpose is not only to help enrich your knowledge about the Bible but that we would also cultivate our admiration of God's wisdom. First, we have the word "**law**" (v. 1), from which we get the transliterated word "Torah." Law is the general instruction of God's requirement for His people. In the narrow sense, Torah refers to the first 5 books of the Old Testament, or the Law of Moses. Then there is the word "**statutes**" (v. 2 and 14), which is a collection of testimonies of God's covenantal acts in His people. Therefore, observance of these statutes is an expression of people's loyalty to God in the covenant. Next, we have the word "**ways**" (v. 3) and a synonym of it in verse 15, which is also translated as "ways" in the NIV Bible. Both words are figurative expressions to indicate that God's Word can lay out one's path of life. As we continue with our list the word "**precepts**" (v. 4 and 15) appears. The root for this word is the verb "appoint." It emphasizes the authority of God to determine His requirements for His people. So far we have already covered half of the 10 words. The sixth word is translated as "**decrees**" (v. 5, 8, 12 and 16), which emphasizes the boundary God prescribed for us. Then we have the word "**commands**" (v. 6 and 10). As the word indicates they are the rules from God. The next word that is rendered "**laws**" in the NIV (v. 7 and 13) is different from Torah in verse 1. This word can be understood as "judgment," which refers to the standard for God's role of ruling like a judge. The final term on the list are two similar terms, which are both translated as "**word**" (v. 9 and 16 vs v. 11). They describe the spoken words from

God. An example would be divine revelation from God through the prophets. I hope this brief introduction can help us appreciate the wealth of God's wisdom behind those terms.

Since God's Word is so wonderful to us how should we treat it? The psalmist encouraged us to incorporate God's Word into our daily life. If I can summarize the truth contained in the 16 verses it comes down to two simple principles: we are to love God's Word and we are to live by God's Word.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 喜愛神的話 Love God's Word

First of all, we have to love God's Word. There are a long list of action words we can see from this passage. We can basically group them into three categories.

#### A. 研讀 Read

First, we have to spend time to read on God's Word. As we can see soon this reading activity is not only for our growth in intellectual knowledge. **Verse 7** says: I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. The psalmist has a learning heart for God's Word. He also says in **verse 12**: Praise be to you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. Here the verb "teach" is the same word for "learn" in verse 7. It is easy to understand that teaching and learning are two opposite roles in a classroom setting. Once a pastor said he was hoping that the brothers and sisters in his church were either teachers or students in Sunday school classes. I do not have the latest numbers for our Mandarin Sunday school attendance. But I know for sure that it is not 100%. So I encourage everyone to stay behind after the service to attend a class that fits your need. Obviously, another way to read God's Word is simply to read through the Bible. It is never too late to sign up for our daily Bible reading plan. Besides spending time to studying God's Word another way for reading is to ponder on the Scripture. The psalmist says in **verse 15**: I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. The word "meditate" means to think it over carefully. It is like after a cow has done grazing on the pasture it will sit down somewhere, regurgitate the food and chew further on the curd to ensure better digestion. When we have personal devotion we put more focus on quality than quantity. Usually we only read a chapter or a section of the Bible. As we are reading we pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit that God would speak to us through a particular verse or even phrase. We ponder on that insight and apply it to our life.

#### B. 重視 Regard

We love God's Word by spending time in reading. The psalmist continues to tell us that we love God's Word also by showing regard to it. **Verse 2** reads: Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. The same word "seek" also appears in **verse 10**: I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. The word "seek" has a broader meaning than simply to look for something. It means to consult it, just like we ask an expert for advice. The psalmist prayed that God would keep him walking in the right way as he regarded God's Word. If you highly regard an expert's advice you should not just listen to it, but also follow the instructions too. If we regard a man's advice, how much more we should regard God's truth?

Many Christians can share an experience that God speaks to us through His Word when we are looking for answer in a bottleneck situation. We show our regard to God's Word by seeking after it. We can also do so by considering it. **Verse 6** says: Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. The word "consider" means to pay attention to. The psalmist testifies that when he considered God's Word he would not be put to shame, which is to say that God would never disappoint him. This notion of not being put to shame is a common theme in the psalm. For example, in **Psalm 25:2** David says that when he put his trust in the Lord he would not be put to shame in front of his enemies: In you I trust, O my God. Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. David trusted that God would rise up for him.

### C. 記住 Remember

We love the Word of God by reading it and by regarding it. The third way we show our love toward God's Word is to remember it. The psalmist says in **verse 11**: I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. The word "hidden" does not mean covering up a secret. Some of the wives may hide away some money from their husbands and use it for personal enjoyment. That is not what the psalmist is talking about it. The word means storing up treasure. The psalmist specifies that he hides God's Word in his heart. The result is that God's Word would alert him not to sin. Besides hiding God's Word in the heart the psalmist also says in **verse 16** that he would not forget God's Word: I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. The word "neglect" has the connotation of "ignore." While the worry over sinning against God may serve as a negative reminder for us to hide God's Word in our hearts, the psalmist shares with us that since he loved God's Word, he would not forget to follow His way. Our Bible memorization plan serves the very purposes. Though nowadays many people use electronic Bible, which has key-word search function, nothing can replace memorizing God's Word in our hearts. Moreover, throughout the Bible from the Old to the New Testament loving God and loving His Word always go hand in hand. For example, in **Deuteronomy 6:4-6**, which every Jew knows how to recite, read: 4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Another example is in **1 John 5:3** - This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome. God does not want us to remember His word out of fear for punishment. Instead, He expects obedience that grows out of love to Him.

### 2. 活出神的話 Live God's Word

We should incorporate God's Word into our daily life. We do so by loving God's Word. We can also incorporate God's Word into our daily life by living it out.

#### A. 實行 Practice

First of all, we have to put God's Word into practice. In this passage the psalmist uses three different words to advise us how to practice God's Word.

The word "walk" appears in both verses 1 and 3. In **verse 1** he says: Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Then in **verse 3**: They do

nothing wrong; they walk in his ways. Here “walk” is a metaphorical expression for following God’s Word as guidance just like a train running on railroad tracks. The result is that those who walks in God’s way will receive His blessings. I remember when I went to China more than 20 years ago I saw one type of bus that were powered by electricity. On the roof top of the bus there is a device that connects to the over-hanging wires which conduct electricity. The driver still needs to steer the bus like driving an ordinary vehicle. But he cannot go beyond where the cable cannot reach. Otherwise, the bus will lose power and cannot move. Similarly, if we stray away from God’s way we cannot get His blessings.

Besides walking in God’s way another means to practice God’s Word in our life is to guard it. The psalmist tells us in **verse 2**: Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. The word “keep” has the meaning of watch or guard like a security personnel who stays on alert against an intruder. The idea is that we have to be careful to discern that what we do is based on God’s Word. Then a third way the psalmist encourages us to practice God’s Word is simply to obey it. This word “obey” is used 4 times in this passage. Let us look at **verses 4 to 5**: 4 You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. 5 Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Also in **verses 8 and 9**: 8 I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me. 9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. The word “living” in verse 9 is the same word for “obey” in the Hebrew text. The psalmist specifies the benefit for a young man, which can be understood as a little boy, to obey God’s Word that it will keep his way pure. We all know the importance of giving young children correct instruction. My older son has begun his football practice this week. I noticed that after his first practice he quit drinking soda. I asked: “Let me guess: it is your coach who told you to drink water only.” My wife and I may tell our son something ten times and he still forgets it. But when his coach said it just once he complied immediately. I should seriously consider inviting his coach to come to my home regularly. **Proverbs 22:6** reads: Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Children have a pure heart, and they will absorb whatever they hear as right. Therefore, it is important to help them learn from God’s truth at home. A simple thing is just to read the Bible. Last Sunday Pastor Manning gave our young people the challenge to read 3 chapters of the New Testament a year in the summer. Those who finish the task by August 31 will receive a certificate. I encourage all the parents to do the same thing with your children.

## B. 宣講 Proclaim

We live out God’s Word by putting it into daily practice. We can also live out God’s Word by proclaiming it. The psalmist says in **verse 13**: With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. The word “recount” means to “number” or “declare.” This word is used in **Psalm 71:15** - My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. The word “tell” and “measure” are verb and noun form, respectively, of the same word “recount” in Psalm 119:13. There is a traditional hymn by the title “Count Your Blessing.” It reminds us to remember God’s wonderful grace in our lives and to proclaim it. Sometimes when I attended a Bible study meeting the leader would conclude when he/she was done leading brothers and sisters to understand the passage. We should go one step further to recount how God’s Word applies to us. When we chat with our unbelieving family members overseas, our colleagues or our classmates about our so-called accomplishment in life we should take the opportunity to proclaim the name of God and give glory to Him.

## CONCLUSION

The author of Psalm 119 encourages us to incorporate God's Word into our daily life. We have to love God's Word and we also have to live out God's Word. The Bible is not only a book of knowledge about God, for God's intent is not to train us into scholars. The Bible is not only a book of moral codes, because God is not interested in establishing a better society only. The Bible tells us about how to build a close relationship with God, such that we can have fundamental changes to become more like Christ.