

God's Word

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:105–112

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Joshua 1:8–9; 2 Kings 22:8–20;
Acts 17:10–12

Psalm 19:7–13

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

2 Timothy 3:14–15

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Key Text

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.—2 Timothy 3:16–17

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the role of Scripture in revealing God and His desires.
2. Explain how the two lesson passages teach believers to value God’s Word.
3. Make a plan to look to God’s Word for guidance in making wise choices.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. Treasured Possessions

B. Lesson Context

I. Gifts from God (Psalm 19:7–11)

A. Life-Giving Instructions (v. 7)

B. Trustworthy Guidance (v. 8)

C. Enduring Value (vv. 9–11)

II. Purpose for the Gifts (Psalm 19:12–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–15)

A. Warning Against Wrongs (Psalm 19:12–13)

To See Ourselves as Others See Us

B. Granting Wisdom (2 Timothy 3:14–15)

A Value of Childhood

Conclusion

- A. Book of Immeasurable Value
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Bathsheba	Bath- <i>she</i> -buh.
Eunice	U- <i>nye</i> -see or U-nis.
Lois	<i>Lo</i> -is.
Uriah	Yu- <i>rye</i> -uh.

Introduction

A. Treasured Possessions

My mother was a woman of exemplary Christian faith. After she went to be with the Lord, members of our family began going through her belongings. Among the items we found were various Bibles that mom had kept through the years. There were a couple of Bibles in which she kept family records, bookmarks, newspaper clippings, and small pieces of paper filled with Scripture references. More recently, mom had acquired a large study Bible with footnotes and commentary helps. Even those bore the signs of regular use. I was reminded of the saying, “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.”

Mom didn’t just treasure the Bibles in her home; she memorized Scripture, which kept the wisdom of God on her lips and near her heart. As a result, she found opportunities to apply Scripture in many situations. Through her testimony of faithfulness, the Spirit of God was active.

B. Lesson Context

This lesson pairs two texts—one from the Old Testament and one from the New—that praise God for revealing Himself. Although the canon of Scripture was not complete when either of today’s texts were written, the claims of these texts apply to the entirety of God’s self-revelation in Scripture. It is not the invention of any human; it is inspired by God and communicated by human witnesses (2 Peter 1:16; compare Hebrews 1:1).

The superscription of Psalm 19 calls it a “Psalm of David,” meaning the words could have been written by David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1), or written for him, perhaps as a reminder that Israel’s kings should listen carefully to God. The psalm is known as the great “hymn of revelation” within the corpus of the Psalms because it speaks to both “general” and “special” revelation. The first half of Psalm 19 heralds God’s revelation as made known from the fact of creation; this is information available to everyone (compare Romans 1:20). The second half of the psalm, which includes the reading for today, turns to praise for God’s spoken and written word. These two sources of divine self-revelation—creation and word—hang together because they find their source in God’s desire to communicate with those created in His image.

When we shift to considering the New Testament text for this study, we will be moving forward in time more than 1,000 years from the writing of Psalm 19. Our arrival point will be about AD 67, when the apostle Paul was near the end of his ministry (and his life), and he knew it (2 Timothy 4:6–8). It’s easy to sense a tone of urgency in his second letter to his protégé Timothy as the aged apostle stressed anew which was the more important revelation.

I. Gifts from God

(Psalm 19:7–11)

A. Life-Giving Instructions (v. 7)

7. The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

Beginning with this verse, the psalmist shifts from general revelation to special revelation (see the Lesson Context for the distinction). Each of the six lines of Psalm 19:7–9 begins with a noun; these are set in parallel phrases, each expressing something about God’s revealed truth. The six nouns are *law* and *testimony* here in verse 7, “statutes” and “commandment” in verse 8, plus “fear” and “judgments” in verse 9.

It’s tempting to work through these terms individually to detect minute differences in meaning. But to do so is to risk missing the bigger picture of how the feature of parallelism works in Hebrew poetry. That parallelism is characterized by the use of

synonyms to express the same thought. Such parallelism is at work in the first four of the six words noted above: *law*, *testimony*, *statutes*, and *commandment*. Each word has specific characteristics, but all four are synonymous.

Parallelism isn't the only feature we see here. These verses also contain repetition of sentence structure. In verses 7 and 8, we see this pattern four times:

synonym for law + Lord + fact + outcome

Parallelism is much less evident in the outcomes in our text, and that is the psalmist's point: reading and heeding God's instructions have many benefits. The first to be mentioned among the four is the role the instructions have in *converting the soul*. The word *converting* has the sense of "restoreth," as translated in Psalm 23:3.

The nature of *making wise the simple*, the second outcome, is significantly expanded in Psalm 119:98–100, 130. The word *simple*, as used in our daily conversations to describe people, is often a positive evaluation. In that sense, it may refer to someone who is free from vanity. But in the Old Testament, "the simple" are those who are either gullible, lack a moral compass, or are inclined toward evil (Proverbs 1:4; 7:7; 21:11; etc.).

B. Trustworthy Guidance (v. 8)

8. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The parallelism in sentence structure explained above continues. The purity and correctness of God's stated requirements produce two results (in addition to those of the previous verse): *rejoicing the heart* and *enlightening the eyes*. Descriptors "right," "upright," and "pure" can describe people (Job 11:4; Psalm 24:4; Proverbs 29:10; etc.). God may also be praised as "upright" (Psalms 25:8; 92:15). But in this verse, these qualities even apply to the directives that come from God.

This verse corrects a common misunderstanding—that the teachings of God will stifle human enjoyment or make life dull. Instead, wisdom from God is like a treasure to be uncovered or a reward to be enjoyed (Proverbs 2:1–4; compare Psalm 119:162). In other texts, merriment for the heart—the intent of God's *statutes*—comes from hearing music, enjoying wine, or receiving a kind word (45:8; 104:15; Proverbs 12:25). These are not activities of a dull life!

At the same time, living by God's standards will train the human gaze to focus on what is good in God's sight, thus avoiding "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). Eyes that are trained to see people and situations as *God* sees can glimpse with clarity. That kind of gaze is sound—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—for God does not leave His

people to grope blindly through life with no sense of direction. God's declarations are a trustworthy guide.

C. Enduring Value (vv. 9–11)

9. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

Fear of the Lord is known as “the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10), since all wisdom has its source in God. “Fear,” in this case, means a reverent respect for God's authority, which also accepts *the judgments of the Lord*. Fear of God is sometimes coupled with disdain for evil—even the evil that might arise in one's own selfish motives (8:13).

Submission to God's authority means accessing a “fountain of life” (Proverbs 14:27; compare Deuteronomy 30:19–20). God's people can be confident that the Creator knows what is best, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

The word *clean* is often used for ceremonial purity (Leviticus 10:10; Deuteronomy 12:15). This can also describe God's words, perhaps by analogy to “pure gold” (compare Exodus 25:11–39). To revere God and abide by His words leads to a clean life (Psalm 119:9; compare John 15:3). As the *true and righteous* judge, God is always fair and immune to bribes or partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17).

What Do You Think?

How will you practice “fear of the Lord” this week?

Digging Deeper

In what ways is our “fear of the Lord” connected to our love for Him? How do Deuteronomy 10:12 and 1 John 4:18 inform your response?

10. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

David uses a pair of comparisons to highlight the value of God's Word. *Gold* and *honey* are each pleasing and satisfying in their own way, but neither can provide the spiritual riches and nourishment that God's Word can. Even the highest quality of each of these items (the finest gold; honey from the *honeycomb*) will provide only temporary pleasure (compare Psalm 119:72, 103, 127). Gold cannot refresh the soul; it cannot give lasting joy to the heart.

What Do You Think?

What modern-day comparisons would you use to highlight the value of God's Word?

Digging Deeper

How will you use these comparisons to teach others to study God's Word?

11. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

In many Bibles, the words of Jesus are printed in red to call attention to them. What if Bibles were printed in another color whenever words of warning appear? Many verses would bear that color, for numerous warnings can be found within God's Word. Therein lies part of the value of the Scriptures: they are honest in their assessment of the human condition and make very clear the consequences of choosing to reject what God has spoken.

On the other hand, the Scriptures are just as clear concerning the *reward* that comes to those who faithfully keep their message. Both warnings and rewards are seen in passages such as the blessings and curses that Moses set before the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28. The New Testament epistles include an abundance of "great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4), but they also contain numerous warnings to Christians. The book of Hebrews provides several examples of both: promises of blessing (Hebrews 4:14–16; 6:9–10; 12:22–24; 13:14) and solemn warnings (2:1–4; 4:12–13; 10:26–31; 12:25).

II. Purpose for the Gifts

(Psalm 19:12–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–15)

A. Warning Against Wrongs (Psalm 19:12–13)

12. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

The psalm takes a sudden turn as David, in the middle of extolling the greatness of the Lord and the virtues of His Word, pauses to reflect on his personal failures to measure up to the high standards revealed therein. Much the same occurs in Psalm 139, where David praises the Lord for His awareness of every detail of David's life (139:1–18) then ends with a prayer for God to examine him and reveal any areas of his life that He finds displeasing (139:23–24). In the previous verse of Psalm 19, David notes the "great reward" awaiting those who have kept the Lord's commandments (19:11, above). Then, looking into his own heart, he wonders, "Have *I* kept them? What if there are *secret* sins

I am unaware of?” Given the context, David is likely referring to secret or unknown thoughts, words, and actions that have not been pleasing to God (compare 90:8; 139:23–24). David echoes what the prophet Jeremiah declared about the human heart: it is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

David’s plea for cleansing is similar to his words of repentance in Psalm 51:1–2. God alone can create a clean heart (51:10). Only He can wash our sins so that they are as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). We should also take note of how Psalm 19 concludes: with David’s prayer that both his words and his thoughts will be pleasing before the Lord (Psalm 19:14, not in our printed text).

What Do You Think?

How does confession to another believer lead to revealing and cleansing “secret faults”?

Digging Deeper

Who is another believer to whom you may confess sin and be strengthened in your obedience to God?

To See Ourselves as Others See Us

One of my fellow hospital chaplains had a problem with habitual sin. He was angry at a fellow chaplain, and that anger affected the way he did his job. He struggled to maintain a professional relationship with the other chaplain. The enraged chaplain was tempted to gossip about this other person. When he did so, he felt justified in having a bad attitude toward the chaplain he did not get along with.

When we pointed this out to him in one of our meetings, he was shocked. He had not realized he was doing this, and he immediately apologized to the group and the other chaplain. This blind spot now revealed provided an opportunity for growth.

God’s Word can show us our blind spots in uncountable ways. If this doesn’t happen—and we all have blind spots—spiritual growth is stunted. When was the last time God’s Word revealed one of yours?

—L. M. W.

13. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Presumptuous sins is the category of deliberate, intentional sin, committed not in ignorance but in defiance. Whether the sins are “secret” (Psalm 19:12, above) or committed in willful rebellion against the Lord, David wants no part. His prayer brings to mind the example that Jesus set for us in the Lord’s Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).

However, we note that David did not always follow his own prayer. David is called a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), yet David and the nation were punished because of his presumptuous, sinful pride (1 Chronicles 21:17). His adultery with Bathsheba and his role in the death of Uriah would have a significant effect on his life and the lives of his descendants (2 Samuel 11–12). Therefore, David well knows that certain types of sin may exert a powerful sway over people. He describes this influence as *dominion*. We are wise to recognize that the devil may have strongholds of sin in our lives (see 2 Corinthians 10:4).

The content of the temptations in our high-tech contemporary world is far different from what David faced, though the issues are the same (such as lust, pride, and hatred). God’s Word remains our “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17); without it, we leave ourselves vulnerable to “the wiles of the devil” (6:11).

What Do You Think?

How can believers overcome destructive sin habits that “dominate” our lives?

Digging Deeper

To what extent is this possible through personal willpower? through mutual accountability? through the Holy Spirit?

B. Granting Wisdom (2 Timothy 3:14–15)

In this letter, Paul has been very candid with his protégé Timothy about the latter’s need for exceptional courage, strength, and spiritual discipline (2 Timothy 1:7; 2:1, 22). Paul warns Timothy of the “perilous times” to come in the “last days” (3:1). This is because of the variety of “perilous people” who will oppose Timothy and his message (3:2–9). That message, however, possesses an authority and a power that stands above the times, no matter how perilous they may be.

14. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.

The apostle Paul has placed the spotlight primarily on himself up to this point in the letter. This is seen in his use of the words *me*, *my*, and *I* about twice as often as he uses the words *thee* and *thou* in 2 Timothy 1:1–3:13.

But the imperative *but continue thou* signals a change in focus. From 3:14 through 4:5, the spotlight shifts to Timothy, Paul’s “son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2). He is the one being encouraged—even commanded—to embrace and practice fully the things he *hast learned and hast been assured of*.

15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The ultimate basis of Timothy’s faith and practice is to be *the holy scriptures* since “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16–17, not in our printed text). Because the New Testament as we know it does not exist at the time Paul writes to Timothy, Paul is affirming the texts we know as the Old Testament to be capable of making one *wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (compare Luke 24:27; Acts 8:30–35; Romans 1:2–4).

But lest we be too eager to jump to that ultimate basis, we should take note of a model in that regard: the apostle Paul himself. Paul is the one from whom Timothy “hast learned and hast been assured of,” regarding the final phrase of the previous verse. To this point in the letter, Paul has been stressing himself as a pattern to follow (2 Timothy 1:8, 13; 2:2–3). Two other patterns for Timothy to follow are those of his own “grandmother Lois” and “mother Eunice” (1:5), since they were undoubtedly the ones who ensured that Timothy knew the Scriptures from his childhood days.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you be a spiritual “parent” or “grandparent” to a younger believer?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to mentor a younger believer in studying Scripture?

A Value of Childhood

Recently a coworker complained to me that she had made a mistake that another employee then blamed on the woman's youth. The complainer was frustrated because she did not think her youth had contributed to her mistake. As she spoke, the words of 1 Timothy 4:12 came to mind. There, Paul urges Timothy not to let others look down on him because of his youth.

I likely stored this gem away in my heart and memory during my early days of Sunday school and youth group. While I admit that Scripture memorization is not a big part of my adult life, the verses I memorized as a child still come to mind in relevant circumstances.

Our text from 2 Timothy 3:15 reminds us that those Scriptures we have learned in childhood are foundational to who we are today. What role can you play in teaching children Scripture?

—L. M. W.

Conclusion

A. Book of Immeasurable Value

In May 2023, a Hebrew Old Testament described as “one of the most important and singular texts in human history” became the most valuable manuscript ever sold at an auction. The Codex Sassoon, dating from the late ninth or early tenth century AD, sold for \$38.1 million at Sotheby's in New York City. It may be the very earliest single volume containing all the books of the Hebrew Bible.

That multimillion-dollar auction value may tempt us to connect it with Psalm 19:9–10, which values God's Word above gold. But no matter how much an ancient or modern Bible sells for, it renders no eternal value to the one possessing it who does not read and heed its contents. Today's lesson texts highlight this timeless truth. There is a value to the Bible that cannot be measured in monetary terms.

But not all agree, and the Bible's timeless value has been called into question by various challenges, attacks, and misunderstandings as the ages of history have progressed. But truth is truth in any era of history. What David acknowledged back in the Iron Age was reaffirmed by Paul in the Classical Age and invites reaffirmation today in the Information Age.

One particular challenge of the Information Age is the sheer volume of information available. Were they alive today, we might wonder if the writer of Ecclesiastes would change the word *books* to *websites* in this observation: “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12)! One observer of

culture commented that people today don't actually *read* while on the Internet; they are merely *scanning for information*. The difference between the two is important. If we slip into the scanning approach, the Bible will become for us no more than a collection of proof texts lacking genre and historical context.

When was the last time you read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting? If it's been a while, try this right now: read the whole letter of 2 Timothy without interruption. This will take no more than nine minutes of reading at a leisurely pace of 200 words per minute. If you "don't have time" to do so, what does this say about your Bible study habits?

B. Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for providing us with the precious treasure of Your Word, the Bible. It is indeed a light for us in this dark world. Thank You for its timeless wisdom and, most of all, for its message of salvation through the living Word, Christ Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Keep the words of Scripture—and they will keep you.