

SESSION 3

Committed to His Word



QUESTION 1:

What advice would you include if you wrote a how-to book on growing older?

THE POINT

God's Word gives trustworthy guidance for all of life.

THE PASSAGE

Psalm 119:1-11

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

It's frustrating to sit in a class and discover you know more about the subject than the instructor does. *"Aren't you supposed to be an authority on this subject?"*

For several years, some states with a shortage of certified teachers have been offering an emergency teaching certificate, allowing non-certified, under-qualified teachers to teach in public schools. In 2018, one state had to issue over two thousand such certificates.¹ It may be better than having no teacher at all, but parents want to know that those who are teaching math or science to their kids actually know what they are talking about.

When it comes to instruction, we want reliable information. When it comes to how to live life, we encounter a lot of self-proclaimed authorities on the matter. Such so-called experts might be OK if we're changing a carburetor or baking a pie, but we need to consider carefully what authority we look to for gaining eternal life.

We have that authority in the Bible. God has revealed Himself to us through His written Word, and He is the only Source and Authority worth listening to. The Bible gives us the answers we need.

Psalm 119:1-4

- 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.**

Psalm 119 is a primary passage of Scripture that points to God's Word as the ultimate guide and authority for us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the psalmist pointed to the sufficiency of God's Word as the ultimate source of life, joy, and peace.

Twice in this passage the writer used a key word: *blessed*. This word means many things to the modern reader, but the original Hebrew term carried the idea of being fully satisfied. Jesus used similar phrasing in the Beatitudes when He said, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" ... "blessed are they that mourn" ... "blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness"; and so forth (Matt. 5:3-11).

When the psalmist wrote, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way," he was saying a person whose walk is blameless will find the highest form of human satisfaction and the ultimate experience of human life. We can only find the blameless way by following the Word of God, and when we do that, we are truly "blessed."

What a profound statement! We can only find the highest, most blessed human experience on this earth by walking "in the law of the LORD." But then, the psalmist tells us the *extent* to which we need to walk according to God's Word. "Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart." A blameless life is one lived 100 percent committed to God. In other words, we can't find the highest form of blessing in our lives if we

only seek the Lord and His Word with a half-hearted commitment. The blessing comes when our whole heart is in it.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8). When our hearts are purely devoted to God, we can receive and experience the highest form of blessing. Over and over throughout Scripture, we see this one reality: complete obedience to God’s Word brings blessing. I’ve found that to be gloriously true. I’ve also learned that seeking the fullness of life *apart* from obedience to God’s Word never works. *Never*. When I stray from God’s commands, it produces emptiness and an experience of life that never really satisfies. On the contrary, diligent obedience to the words and commands of God has given me exactly what it said it would: blessing.

QUESTION 2:

What are some ways God’s Word has been a blessing in your life?

Psalm 119:5-8

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.

Shame is one of Satan’s greatest weapons. He uses shame hoping to keep us down—to make us feel unworthy to worship God, follow God, or even know God. Satan uses shame as a weapon to make us hate ourselves and believe we are unworthy of God’s love.

I want to draw a distinction between *shame* and *conviction*. Conviction is not the same as feeling shame. *Shame* is something

Satan throws at us to keep us down; *conviction* comes from God's Holy Spirit with the purpose of leading us to repent and turn back to Him.

When we give our lives to Christ, He comes to live in us through His Holy Spirit. As His children, we can't sin any more without being convicted by the Holy Spirit. God hates sin, so when we sin, His Spirit lets us know through the act of conviction. His purpose is always to restore us. When we sin, the Holy Spirit whispers to us, "That's not how you were created to live; come back and obey God."

Satan has another goal when we sin: shame. The tempter becomes the accuser, and he whispers things like: "You sinned *again*? I thought you were a Christian. ... How many times are you going to keep on doing the same old awful things? ... How do you think you'll ever be worthy of worshiping God, knowing all you've done?"

Don't ever forget this one truth: shame comes from the enemy *to keep us away from God*, but conviction comes from the Holy Spirit *to bring us back to Him*.

We can avoid all the accusations, the shame, and the humiliation by remaining steadfastly devoted and obedient to God. The psalmist began verse 5 essentially with a cry, a desperate desire to be fully committed to God's Word. It's almost as if the psalmist sighed to himself with the gravity of the thought. The cry of his heart was to follow the word of the Lord with every single second of his life! Why? "Then shall I not be ashamed."

Very simply, our greatest weapon against Satan's plan to get us to sin and bury us in shame is obedience to God's Word. The psalmist is to be commended for his desire to be obedient—a desire we also should embrace—but we know, just as the psalmist did, that remaining steadfast in obedience can be hard. Our human nature is prone to sin, but we can stand against temptation when we lean on Christ. The psalmist recognized both the beauty and power of

God's commands and the need for His help. As we seek to obey, we should pray even as the psalmist prayed, "O forsake me not utterly." We need the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to be obedient, and when we lean on Him, something marvelous will happen: we will not be put to shame.

QUESTION 3:

What's the relationship between following God's Word and fellowship with Him?

DIGGING DEEPER

WORDS FOR THE WORD

Psalm 119 is a masterful celebration of the Torah (translated "instruction" or "law") of the Lord. It consists of 176 verses, divided into 22 stanzas, each of which contains 8 verses. In each stanza, the eight verses begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus, it is an acrostic poem. For example, the first eight lines begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph*; the next eight lines begin with the second letter, *beth*, and so forth. An analogy would be if someone were to write a similar poem in English, the first 8 lines would begin with the letter "a," the next 8 with the letter "b." This pattern would continue until the poem was complete with 208 lines (26 x 8).

Psalm 119 is rightly classified as a Torah psalm because of its focus on the Lord's Torah. The heart of Psalm 119 is Torah, the law and instruction that God gave Israel at Mount Sinai. This law or instruction, however, had already been written on the heart of Israel's founding patriarch, Abraham (Gen. 26:5). As we read the Old Testament and, in particular the Psalms, we find that God's Torah is expressed in three forms: His ways, works, and words. The psalmists instruct God's people about the Lord's actions in history, His "ways," which are a prime way of revealing His character (Ps. 25). As the Lord's actions show us His ways, they also present His "works," such as "justice," "truth," "righteousness," and "faithfulness" (Pss. 25; 111).

Francis X. Kimmitt, "Words for the Word," *Biblical Illustrator*, Winter 2016-17, 60-63.

Psalm 119:9-11

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.

Let's be honest: sin offers momentary pleasure. If it didn't offer something enjoyable, we wouldn't be tempted to sin in the first place. But any pleasure derived is only momentary and what's left for most people is emptiness. Why? Because sin never satisfies.

Followers of Christ still sin, but when we do, we're not left alone with the emptiness. We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit; we now react to sin differently than when we weren't believers. We can no longer enjoy sin. We might sense some pleasure for a fleeting moment, but the Holy Spirit immediately begins to convict us and produce in us a holy discontent. As believers, if we choose to walk down the path of sin, it's just a matter of time until we come to our senses and repent. Why? We are God's children and the Holy Spirit who lives within us will never let us be OK with sin.

In light of this reality, the goal of every believer ought to be to set our hearts toward obedience to God and away from the path of sin. It really is the only way we will ever find rest and peace. Here the psalmist gave us the path to rest and peace: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word."

Already in Psalm 119, the psalmist has repeatedly made an inseparable connection between living right and obeying God's Word. He knew that no shame would come his way if he kept the commands and statutes of God, and in verse 9, he made a parallel

statement, connecting purity and obedience. As long as we're living according to God's Word, our way of life will remain pure.

QUESTION 4:

What specific steps can you take to increase the influence of God's Word in your life?

To remain pure and keep from sinning, the psalmist noted, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart." I love that phrase! The Hebrew word for *hid* carries the idea that something of great value has been treasured or hoarded; it's the picture of buried treasure. Perhaps a more everyday picture is a kitchen pantry. Many of us have shelves full of food: canned foods, flour, oils, chips, spices, you name it. We've spent a good amount of time and money storing up the things we need to provide for our families. We may not consume it all this week, but we have stored it all away so that when we need it, it's there.

We should do the same thing with God's Word: hoard it, tuck it away in our hearts so that when we need it, it is readily available. I fear far too many of us have "empty pantries," and we are starving for God's Word. We take a minute here or a minute there, maybe only on Sunday mornings, to let our hearts dwell on the Word of God. When we're not feeding regularly and getting nourished by Scripture, we're easily tempted to sin. The culture's worldview can easily influence our thinking when we have not been filling our minds and nourishing our souls with God's worldview.

On the other hand, when we treasure and store up God's Word in our hearts, we feast on His goodness and provision. We leave no room for sin in our lives when our hearts are full of God's Word.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another treasure God's Word?

ENGAGE

Choose one of the following images that best represents a situation where God's guidance is needed. Then write a prayer of thanks for the times God has given you this kind of guidance.



My Prayer:

LIVE IT OUT

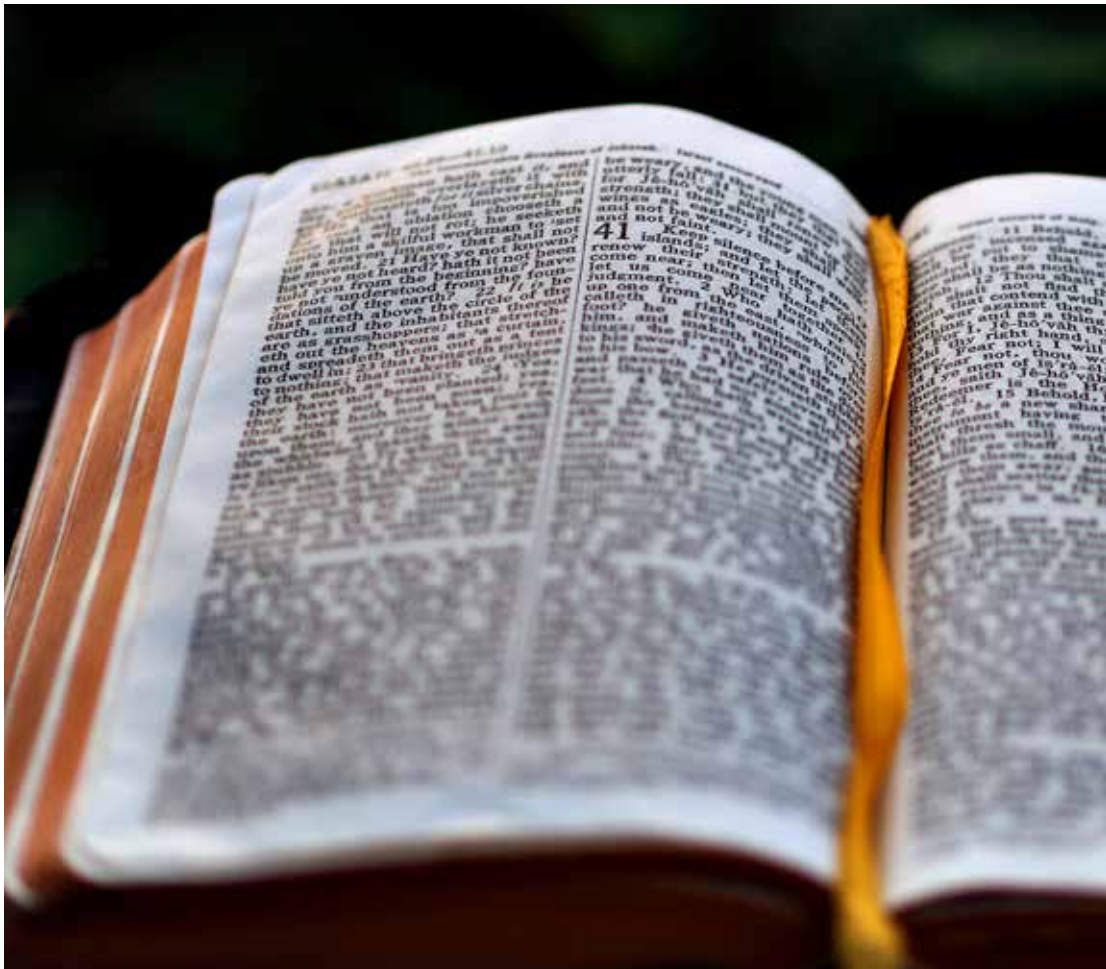
How will you let God's Word provide trustworthy guidance in your life?

- ▶ **Read.** If God's Word has not been a part of your life, begin now to make it so. Take time every day to read Scripture and meditate on what you read. A good place to start is the Gospel of John. Before you read, ask God to speak to you. He loves you and desperately wants to meet you in that time with Him.
- ▶ **Store.** Consider practical ways to store up God's Word in your heart. For example, download an audio Bible and commit to listening to God's Word during your morning and evening commute. Use an app like Scripture Memory Bible to help you memorize Scripture. If you have children, use your dinner table as a time to teach your kids the Word of God.
- ▶ **Teach.** Commit to helping others know God's Word. Multiply your group's ministry by starting a new Bible study. Reach out to those not currently in a group and let God use you to help them discover the rich guidance from His Word.



END NOTES

1. Mary Ellen Flannery, "Back to School Without a Qualified Teacher," *neaToday*, September 5, 2018, neatoday.org/2018/09/05/unqualified-teachers-in-public-schools.



SCARED TO GET CLOSE TO GOD

By Scarlet Hiltibidal

I used to feel very uncomfortable around “missions” people. You know who I’m talking about. The people who move to third-world countries on purpose or who run mission teams at church or people who try to get you to think about going on mission trips. I avoided these people because I assumed that they’d either pressure me to do something I didn’t want to do, or they’d take one look at me and label me a bad Christian for not wanting to be a part

When the Holy Spirit gave me the grace to see God as my Good Father and Comforter in this world broken by sin, I stopped running away from Him and started running to Him.

of their particular missional interest. My fear was so thick that I subconsciously avoided listening to God.

About five years ago, our friends Jake and Anna were visiting, and Anna said something that stuck with me. I was sharing some of these Africa/leprosy/boil/missionary-related fears with her.

She said, “Shame and worry are not from God. You’re His daughter. If He wants you to move to Africa, you’re going to want to move to Africa. God loves you, Scarlet. Wherever He leads you, He’s going to give you joy in it”

King David thought the same thing. He wrestled lions and battled giants, which, on the surface, seems harder than moving to another country and he said in Psalm 37:4 (ESV), “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

I don’t know why I’ve always had the idea that living for God meant kicking and screaming my way through a miserable life. Paul wasn’t miserable as he was stoned and beaten for God. I’m sure it wasn’t his favorite, but he counted it all as joy.

After Jake and Anna left, I stood in the kitchen of my little apartment and said, “God ... I’m scared to talk to You ... I’m scared to want You ... ”

Everything in me wanted to end my prayer there. Everything in me wanted to get affirmation from strangers on Facebook. But I forced myself to stand still. I forced myself to feel the fear and look to God.

I continued, now through tears, “God, I don’t want to be close to You, because I know that as soon as I am, You’re going to take my daughter. You’re going to test me. You’re going to take Brandon away. Right?”

And the Holy Spirit responded with gentleness. He responded with His Word. He responded with “The Cure for Anxiety” as my Bible’s subheading calls it.

“Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap

It’s hard to explain the big meaningful interactions I’ve had with God. They tend to have a major you-had-to-be-there feel. But as I stood in that kitchen, enveloped in the agony of my fear, I felt God reach in and brush it away effortlessly, like when you gently blow a stray hair out of your face and back into place. In that little, weirdly shaped kitchen, God poured the truth of His Word

I was standing on holy kitchen linoleum as the Lord reassured me that I am loved, not because I am good, but because He is good.

or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?” (Matt. 6:25-26).

Well, I guess I’m worth more to You than the birds, but look at Job. He loved You and You let Satan take everything he loved ...

I read again ... “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him” (Matt. 7:11).

into my soul. In those minutes that I didn’t run from His presence, the words I’d read and known and twisted into condemnation were clear. “How much more will your Father in heaven give good things?”

I stood in that kitchen and cried in His arms. ... I was standing on holy kitchen linoleum as the Lord reassured me that I am loved—not because I am good, but because He is good. I am scared, but He is good.

“The LORD is good to everyone; his compassion rests on all he has made” (Ps. 145:9).

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

God doesn't delight in hurting His children. His wrath is not poured out on His beloved. When He looks out at His broken people living in this still-so-broken world, He is full of mercy and compassion. And when we walk through the pains of death and trauma and our crippling imaginary concerns, He isn't the enemy. He isn't the aggressor. He's the Comforter.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort

those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows” (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

When the Holy Spirit gave me the grace to see God as my Good Father and Comforter in this world broken by sin, I stopped running away from Him and started running to Him. When the gospel made clear that God has already given me His own Son, I stopped being afraid of the “scary” situations that bring me close to Him.

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