

Lesson 5: The Bible, Part 1

Key concept God's Word

Bible study
Psalm 119,
selected verses

Memory verses
Psalm 119: 103-105

Objectives

- ❖ Understand that the Bible shines light in darkness
- ❖ Understand that the Bible nourishes the spiritual life of believers
- ❖ Understand that the Bible reveals Jesus

Bible Study

"I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." Ps. 119: 14-16

"The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." Ps. 119:72

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

Ps. 119:103-105

Why read the Bible? The Psalmist gives many good reasons when he compares God's word to great riches, delight, sweetness and light. Many faithful followers of Jesus throughout history have based their lives on the truth of the Bible, and even given their lives so that others may know this truth.

Robert Thomas, a Welshman, was one of the first Protestant missionaries to Korea. In 1865, Korea was "the Hermit Kingdom"; it was distrustful of foreigners and had no contact with outsiders. Robert Thomas was teaching English and Chinese in Peking (now Beijing), China at that time. He met two traders from Korea who told him that the people of their country had no Bibles. Thomas became affiliated with the National Bible Society of Scotland, which paid his expenses to travel to Korea with Chinese Bibles in September 1865. He was always heavily disguised in order to conceal his activities of selling and handing out the Bibles. He picked up the Korean language during the four months he spent in the country.

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In an uprising in Korea in 1866, many Roman Catholic converts were massacred. A French delegation was sent to look into the matter and Thomas went along as an interpreter. He took Bibles with him again to give to the Korean people. Once in Korea, his situation changed, and he became a translator on an armed merchant-marine ship, the *General Sherman*.

As the ship sailed upriver, it became involved in a conflict with the army onshore. When the ship ran aground on a sandbar near Pyongyang, the army sent burning rafts toward the ship to set it on fire. Thomas began to throw Bibles to the people on the shore, and shouted, “Jesus, Jesus” to them in Korean. He jumped off the ship, swam to shore, and continued handing out Bibles to the people until he was captured.

The 24 crew members of the ship would be executed that day. When Thomas knelt before his executioner, he handed a Bible to the man who would kill him. According to accounts of the event, Thomas’ executioner, convinced that he had killed a good man, kept the Bible.

A few days after the executions, an edict was announced that threatened the arrest of any person found with one of these books (the Bible) in their possession. Some people, instead of throwing the books away, used the pages as wallpaper on the walls of their homes. Eventually a church was established in the area, and a nephew of Thomas’ killer became a pastor.

Now, if you are skeptical about the Bible, I want you to ask yourself: “What is it about the Bible that would make Robert Thomas think that the most important thing he could do with his last act on this earth was to offer a Bible to his executioner? This lesson will cover three reasons why the Bible so was precious to Thomas and why it is more valuable than any other book to followers of Jesus.

(1) The Bible is a candle to light your path

Ps. 119:105 says, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*” That is what the Bible is for followers of Jesus: a lamp illuminating the path forward. For all of us, life gets really, really dark at times. We need to have a light that can, as Galadriel says to Frodo in the great trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, “be a light... in dark places, when all other lights go out.” The Bible, for followers of Jesus, is just that: a light that shines when all other lights go out. Recently I found myself in the middle of a dark, sleepless night. After tossing and turning for quite some time, I finally pulled out the Bible, and a shaft of light pierced the darkness of my heart. That shaft of light came from Ps. 125:2 (MSG), which says, “*Mountains encircle Jerusalem, and God encircles his people – always has and always will.*” I sat back, closed my eyes, and pictured myself encircled by God like the mountains encircle Jerusalem. Safe, protected, surrounded. Light broke through.

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In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom describes how the Bible functions as a light in dark places, when all other lights go out. Corrie Ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, were imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp; it's difficult to imagine a more dark and confusing path. But there was one thing that kept them going – a hidden Bible.

Corrie writes, “From morning until lights-out, whenever we were not in ranks for roll call, our Bible was the center of an ever-widening circle of help and hope. Like waifs clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about it, holding out our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the word of God. *‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.’*” Their circumstances said they were defeated; the Bible said otherwise.

Corrie continues, “I would look about us as Betsie read, watching the light leap from face to face. More than conquerors. It was not a wish. It was a fact. We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute – poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not ‘we shall be.’ We are!” I love that. The light is pushing back the darkness and the darkness can't snuff it out. “Life in the concentration camp took place on two separate levels...One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived in God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.”

The Bible lights up a path and you see that, in actuality, there are two paths. One grows seemingly more horrible all the time. Your outward body is wasting away – cancer, aging, you name it, our bodies are breaking down. Maybe it's a double dip recession, healthcare crisis, or losing loved ones. Outwardly we're wasting away, but inwardly we're being renewed day by day. “Truth upon truth,” as Corrie puts it, “glory upon glory.” The Bible lights up that alternate path, the path within a path.

So, let me ask you: Are you willing to take up the Bible and read? It is a candle; a light unto your path, to light up a whole new dimension to life. That is what the word of God will do if you take it up and read. But, I must warn you that how you read it matters, and that takes us to the second reason that the Bible is so precious and valuable.

(2) The Bible is a croissant to feed your soul

The thought of biting into a warm croissant is a pleasant one. The aroma, the soft, flaky texture. That experience can fill your whole mind and body with delight.

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And, my friends, that is how you are to read the Bible. You're to eat it as you would a croissant. In fact, Eugene Peterson entitled one of his books, *Eat this Book*, because he encourages us to do just this with the Bible – to eat it. Matthew 4:4, “*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” The Bible, the words of God’s mouth, are our food. If you want to live, then you must learn to eat this book.

Peterson encourages us to eat the Bible much like a dog eats a bone. As soon as he used that metaphor I immediately went back to my days as a kid with my granddad. My granddad had the biggest and softest heart in town. Much to the dismay of my grandmom, he never met a dog that he didn’t love, and he inevitably wound up bringing home a truck full of large, stray dogs.

As soon as we were home, he would head to the kitchen and grab a pile of bones – chicken bones, steak bones, didn’t matter. And when he got near the dogs, they would start salivating; tails wagging, drool coming out of their mouths on both sides, barking with excitement, jumping up and down and prancing back and forth, barking with enough excitement to wake the neighbors. And when he threw them a bone, they would go at it. Snarling and drooling and gnawing, content as content can be. For hours, sometimes days.

One day Peterson read Isaiah 31:4, which says, “*As a lion growls over his prey.*” Peterson says, “‘Growl’ is the word that caught my attention and brought me that little ‘pop’ of delight. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed, and savored his prize, Isaiah’s lion did to this prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as ‘growl’ (which is hagah). Hagah is usually translated as ‘meditate,’ as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose ‘delight is in the law of the Lord.’ But Isaiah uses this word to refer to a lion growling over his prey the way my dog growled with a bone. Meditate is far too tame a word for what is being signified. When Isaiah’s lion and my dog meditated they chewed and swallowed, using teeth and tongue, stomach and intestines: Isaiah’s lion meditating his goat (if that’s what it was); my dog meditating his bone.”

So what Peterson, Isaiah, and the Psalmist are trying to get you and I to do is eat the book the way a dog eats a bone – that is meditating, savoring, prancing, groaning, wrestling, ripping it to shreds. It is less about an intellectual dissection – though there is a place for that – and more about having the word of God consistently form you. Peterson puts it this way:

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“Our primary need from this book is not so much informational but formational.” Informational reading is just learning facts about God and ourselves and the universe from the Bible – facts that even the demons know. But formational reading is what happens when we eat the book like a dog eats a bone.

Now let’s return to my recent time of darkness and discouragement, and I’ll show you how this worked out in my life. I came to the book early in the morning somewhat like a dejected puppy. And then God threw me a bone and I started to gnaw on it. Eyes closed, reading Psalm 18:2 (MSG), “*God is bedrock under my feet, the castle in which I live, my rescuing knight.*”

I gnawed on that for some time and as I meditated, savored, and delighted, the sinking sand under my feet became bedrock. The enemies that seemed to have me pinned down were now outside the castle walls that I lived in. There was a moat that I hadn’t seen before separating me from my enemies. And, my rescuing knight, Jesus, was sitting astride his stallion reminding me that, in Him, I am more than a conqueror.

Now, finally, one more thing. If you want the Bible to come alive, then this third point is the key. Without this, the Bible won’t function as a candle or croissant to you.

(3) The Bible is a conduit taking you to Jesus

A conduit is something that carries one thing to another. A go-between. The conduit, the go-between, in the Bible is Jesus Christ. The Bible is a book that is, from Genesis to Revelation, from cover to cover, about Jesus Christ. You’ll never be that dog with a bone unless you somehow meet Jesus in the text.

In John 5:39 Jesus says, “*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.*” Hear that: you have lots of information about the Bible, but you haven’t been formed with new life, eternal life, by me, the God of the Bible. You believe in God, you have facts and information about Him, but you haven’t come alive spiritually because you have missed me, the whole point of every passage in the Bible.

Jesus went through a similar discussion with the disciples after His Resurrection on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24. Verse 27 says, “*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” Even Moses and the Prophets – they were all talking about him.

John 20:31 says the same thing, “*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*” The whole Bible is written to take you to Jesus.

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All followers of Jesus who have really come alive in Him know this. Let me allow a few of them speak to you. Martin Luther put it this way, “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.” In other words, the entire point of the Bible is Jesus. Just as a cradle without a baby is empty, so a Bible lesson without Jesus is empty. Charles Spurgeon, who was deeply impacted by the Bible, says roughly the same thing in a pithy way: “Don’t you know, young man, that from every town, and every village, and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London... So from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis, Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road to Christ?... I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one... I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.”

Or let’s go back to Robert Thomas, whose story began this lesson. Remember that he headed for the beach with Bibles in his hands and as his executioners hacked him to death with machetes, he offered the Bible up to them and uttered two words in Korean, “Jesus, Jesus.” Here is a man who knew the whole Bible could be summarized in one word, one person, one hero: Jesus.

Corrie Ten Boom says the same thing. The book came alive for her because she met Jesus in it. “Sometimes I would slip the Bible from its little sack with hands that shook, so mysterious had it become to me... I marveled sometimes that the ink was dry. I had believed the Bible always, but reading it now had nothing to do with belief. It was simply a description of the way things were – of hell and heaven, of how men act and how God acts. I had read a thousand times the story of Jesus’ arrest – how soldiers had slapped him, laughed at Him, flogged Him. Now such happenings had faces and voices.”

And then Corrie describes the humiliation of having guards inspect them completely naked, laughing and abusing them. “But it was one of those mornings while we were waiting, shivering, (naked) in the corridor, that yet another page in the Bible leapt into life for me. ‘*He hung naked on the cross.*’ I leaned toward Betsie [her sister who was naked as well in front of her in the line]. Her shoulder blades stood out sharp and thin beneath her blue-mottled skin. ‘Betsie, they took His clothes too.’ Ahead of me I heard a little gasp. ‘Oh, Corrie. And I never thanked him.’”

Stripped naked, hung on a cross, for us. But death wouldn’t have the last word. There was a Resurrection. And as a result, the Bible is no history book; it is alive. And if you put your faith in the hero of this living story, the book will come alive and so will you. For it is an inextinguishable candle, a sumptuous croissant, and the most valuable conduit you’ll ever experience.

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Memory Verses

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
-Psalm 119:103-105

Individual Study and Group Discussion

Opening Question

Based upon the reading, what did you find most helpful? Was anything confusing? What was most challenging?

Study and Discussion Questions

1. In the selected verses of Psalm 119, what specific images does the Psalmist use to describe the words of God in the Bible?
2. From your experience of reading the Bible, what images would you use to describe its value and impact?
3. In what ways could Peterson's explanation of Isaiah 31:4 influence the way you read the Bible?
4. Read Psalm 1:1-3. What is the result of delighting in God's law and meditating on it continually?
5. According to this lesson, how does the Bible become *formational*, not only informational, in the life of the believer? Do you have an example from your own life that illustrates the difference?
6. Based on your understanding of this lesson, why is it important for believers to read and study the Bible?