

**"God's Word Brings Comfort"
(Psalm 119:49-56)
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(Psalm 119:49-56)

⁴⁹ Remember your word to your servant,
for you have given me hope.
⁵⁰ My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.
⁵¹ The arrogant mock me unmercifully,
but I do not turn from your law.
⁵² I remember, Lord, your ancient laws,
and I find comfort in them.
⁵³ Indignation grips me because of the wicked,
who have forsaken your law.
⁵⁴ Your decrees are the theme of my song
wherever I lodge.
⁵⁵ In the night, Lord, I remember your name,
that I may keep your law.
⁵⁶ This has been my practice:
I obey your precepts.

As a pastor, one of the things that I've heard quite often from Christians is that they have a hard time finding the Bible to be relevant. They read it and don't understand it or they complain that it doesn't make sense or it doesn't speak to their life or the situation that they're going through. Maybe you've felt the same way. As a Christian you know you should read the Bible, you believe that it is the Word of God, but if you're honest you also have to confess that at times, maybe even most of the time, we don't find it very relevant. So, when we read Psalm 119 and encounter a person that lived a thousand years before the coming of Christ, before the gift of the Holy Spirit, yet this person has this almost strange, a peculiar love affair with the Word of God. And, consider also that at the time of his writing the Word of God was limited primarily to the Law of God, the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. I'm not certain how much of the Old Testament the psalmist had available to him, but we can say with some confidence that he didn't have much of the prophetic books, nor did he have all the historical books. Let's say, just for argument's sake that he had around half of the writings of the Old Testament.

Now consider, for yourself as a modern day Christian, who is now 3000 years removed from the time of the psalmist, and imagine if all we had available to us was about half of the Old Testament, and within that half, primarily the five books of Moses. Would we be able to echo the heart and the words that the psalmist writes in this chapter? But here we are living as 21st century Christians with not just half of the Old Testament, but with the complete Bible, in its entirety. To us, there is not a single word missing from what God wanted to communicate to us. It's all there in the pages of the Bible. Everything that God wanted us to know are in those 66 books of the Bible and still we struggle with finding the Bible to be relevant. I think we can all agree for the most part that if we found it to be more relevant, we'd spent more time with it.

How is it that the psalmist, the author of the longest chapter in the most important, most influential, most published, most powerful, and dare I say, the most relevant book in human history, is able to take any life situation that he's going through from sorrow, loss, suffering, persecution, temptations, sin, weakness, confidence, faith, celebrations, joy, happiness, whatever the situation and have this kind of love affair with the Bible? How is it that he finds the Bible so very relevant and we so often find the Bible irrelevant and distant? I think it's necessary and important that we address the disconnect that we have with the Bible.

We need to understand that God has so ordained it that we will come to know God first and foremost through his words. The words of God are his self-revelation, his self-disclosure of himself. It's like my cousin who met her husband about 15 years ago through a chat group. In fact, she was the first person I knew that met their future spouse that way. I'm not sure if they at first exchanged pictures or not. Let's say you were on FB and happened to randomly come across a person's page. And as you lurked around the person's page, you found that there were no photos of the person. But you saw pictures of what she liked. Places she'd been to. Photos she had taken. You look at the other pages she liked. And then you find out that she has a blog. So, you start reading her blogs and you find out the things that make her happy and things that annoy her and what her life passions are and so on and all the while never having seen a picture of her, never having heard her voice, never seeing a video. Slowly, your heart is drawn to this person and you want to be her friend. It could be romantic interest, but it could be merely platonic as well. So finally, you muster up the courage to click the friend request button.

It's similar with God. We can't see God with our eyes. There are no pictures or videos of Him. But what we can see are his pictures in nature, in the sky and earth. In green things like plants and trees. We see what God is like in the animal kingdom. We conclude that he must be incredibly creative and powerful and big and maybe a couple other things, but that's about it. And then someone tells us that God has a blog, a book that he's written through the minds and hands of men. In that book God has revealed to us everything he wanted us to know about Him. We learn what his name is, his purpose, his character, his power, his holiness, his justice, his love and mercy and on and on. We learn that he created everything, including us. We learn that he wants to have a purposeful, life-defining relationship with us, but we also learn that we have a problem. We are far too sinful to have a relationship with him and as we continue reading, this book tells us that God himself made a way to bridge the gap, to restore the broken relationship and it was made possible through his Son Jesus. You see, the Bible's the only place where we'll be told with painful honesty, what's wrong with us and with our world. It's the book that says to us, "You're the problem!" And at the same time it's the only book that tells us what the solution is. God himself, out of his unbridled love, made a way through Jesus. Is that not relevant?

This is why one of the very first things Christian missionaries do upon entering an unreached people group, is to translate the Bible into the local language. Some cultures do not have a written alphabet, it's only an oral culture, so Bible translators learn the vocabulary and then create for them an alphabet, and then begin literacy training, while they continue in the work of Bible translation. It's one of the most important things a church can support.

For the non-Christian and the Christian, God has also ordained that our lives will be touched, impacted, changed through the Word of God worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

First, let me talk to the non-Christian person. In Romans 10 the Apostle Paul tells us that in order for a non-Christian to become a Christian they need faith. As a non-Christian you need to understand that the people in this room that are already Christians, were not always Christians. There is no one here who was born a Christian. There is no such thing as born Christians, only born again Christians. All the Christians here have that faith, but before they became Christians they lacked that faith. How did they gain the faith that they needed to believe in God, to believe in the Gospel and become Christians? Through the Word of God.

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (**Romans 10:14**)

So, if you are a not yet a Christian, what you need is faith and that faith is a gift of God, and it comes through the hearing or reading or the preaching of the word of God. I hope you will do that.

So, that's for the non-Christian. What about the Christian person? Oh boy, there are tons of verses in the New Testament that speak about the necessity of the Word of God to cause Christians to grow and change. Consider what the Bible tells us about the way that God works in his people. Look at the nation of Israel. Upon their deliverance from slavery from Egypt, after God's mighty work of salvation what does he do next? He gives them His word. The Ten Commandments and the rest of God's law was given. When God called Jonah to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh, what was the means that God told him to use to change the people? Preach the Word. When we look at the office of the Old Testament prophet, what was his job? To preach, warn, encourage and comfort the people of God. Jump forward to Jesus, sure he healed and he fed and he cast out demons, but when you look at the gospels his primary work, apart from dying on the cross, was to preach and to teach, it was to communicate the Word of God.

Jump further still to the life of the early church. It becomes even clearer. What do we see in the letters? He writes, he teaches, he preaches, he instructs, he corrects, he encourages all through words. This is the method by which God has determined Christian people will change. This is because God is the God of truth and only through the truth can we correct error and only in the presence of truth, activated by the Holy Spirit, can a person grow. Here are just a few verses:

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (**John 14:26**)

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (**John 16:13**)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (**Colossians 1:9-10**)

It is only in the Bible that life's most important subjects are addressed. What is life's most important subject? No, it's not salvation. It's God.

It is only in the Bible that our worldview compasses find their truth north. Our views toward politics, environment, war, poverty, gender, sexuality, education, work, self-worth, all find their correct calibration in the Scriptures.

So, if we are finding that the Bible is not relevant or that we are neglecting the Bible, then the problem is not with the Bible. The problem is with us. There's something wrong with our own hearts. If we like watching panda videos more than reading our Bibles, there's something not right with us.

As we look more closely into today's passage I just want to say just a few words.

The psalmist shows us that he's going through a real rough patch where he's experiencing persecution and suffering. We looked at the subject of suffering a few weeks ago, but since the psalmist speaks of it again, it'd be good for us to take another look as well. He tells us in verse 51 that arrogant people are mocking him unmercifully. They're coming down on him really hard. And in this section he tells us what he did to get through those difficult times, and that's what we want to learn from him.

I want for us to look at just one thing from this passage. There's this thing about remembering. Look at verses 49, 52 and 55. This remembering is seen from two perspectives. In verse 49 he prays and asks for God to remember the word that God had given previously to him, a word that had given him hope. And then, in verses 52 and 56 the psalmist makes a confession that he remembers. He remembers God's laws and he remembers God's name, which is the same as saying that he remembers God. In fact, even verse 49 where he asks God to remember, the psalmist too is remembering. He recalls the word of God, the promise of God that gave him hope in a situation in the past, and he then asks God to remember. So, the psalmist remembers the name of God, the person of God, who he is personally, relationally and then he remembers what God had said, his words, commands and promises.

Well, in his remembering, he recalls that God's word worked. He remembers a past struggle, the suffering that he went through and he remembers that during that suffering God's Word had given him hope. It had given him comfort. It had even saved his life.

This was a part of his ritual, his practice, what we call a spiritual discipline. Look at verse 56. He says "this has been my practice." That means that we too need to build up the habit of going to God and to the word of God when we face difficult times. Regardless of how short or long you've been a Christian, it's important that we begin doing this.

--Let's say a friend has hurt you really deeply and you're finding it very difficult to forgive. What Scripture will you go to?

--What about when you face an unbearable temptation, to which passage will you turn?

--When you feel like giving up on something, what part of the Bible will give you perseverance?

--When you feel like it'd be so much easier to lie than tell the truth at work, what Scripture will give you the resolve to do the right thing?

--If you are at a crossroads in your life, which Bible verse will give you discernment?

--When your heart is restless and anxious, where will you read to find peace?

You get the picture. These are habits that we need to develop. They are not formed overnight. But they do get formed and they do grow. As you do this more and more, you will find that this will become your go-to means, whatever the trial you are going through. Then when we face a fresh trial, we can remember better and receive God's help through his amazing word and we just might stop saying that the Bible is irrelevant. That's how we remember.

What about the other way to remember? In what way do we ask God to remember his word to us? We're not asking God to remember because he is so prone to forgetting. No, when we ask God to remember, it's because we know that God is a God who always remembers. What in particular does God remember? He remembers his covenant promises to his people.

I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. (**Genesis 9:15**)

So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. (**Genesis 19:29**)

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. (**Exodus 2:24**)

We are asking a God who never forgets, to remember!

And then, as we scan the Bible we discover that God commands his people to remember his commands. He says,

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (**Deuteronomy 8:2**)

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees. (**Deuteronomy 16:12**)

Thus, it would be sinful and wrong not to remember, to forget God. In fact later in the storyline of the Bible God's people do forget and they are judged for failing to remember God. To remember God is to place our faith in God.

And then we ask God to remember. Listen to these similar verses:

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. (**Psalms 25:6-7**)

Remember the nation you purchased long ago, the people of your inheritance, whom you redeemed— Mount Zion, where you dwelt. (**Psalms 74:2**)

For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it. (**Jeremiah 14:21**)

That's how it should be with us. We go to God and ask him to remember his promises, which is another way of asking God to fulfill his promises or to keep his promises or to answer his promises. When we pray that way, it is increasing our faith. In asking God to remember we are telling ourselves to remember the God we are praying to. He is a covenant keeping God.

For example, let's say you're praying for a non-Christian friend to become a Christian. How do you pray? Do you pray, "Lord remember how swell of a guy he is. Remember how deserving he is of your salvation. Remember all the good things that he's done." I don't think so. Rather, you get on your knees and say, "Lord, like me, all my friend deserves is your wrath, judgment and hell forever, but Lord, remember that you are a merciful and compassionate God, keeping your covenant promises for thousands of generations. Remember Lord, you said in your word, that you desire that done would perish. Remember not his sins anymore. Forgive him Lord, as you have forgiven me. Open his heart to receive the Gospel, not because he's good, but because you are."

Friends, on what basis does God remember? On what basis can we say to God with the confidence of a child asking her father to remember the promise he made. What's the basis of our confidence that when we ask God to remember that he actually does remember? He remembers for us because of the one who was forgotten. We will never be forgotten because Jesus was forgotten. When Jesus was crucified do you remember what he cried out as he was hanging on the cross? It was the greatest cry spoken by any person in all of human history. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,--forgotten me?!" We will never ever be able to fully comprehend that moment when Jesus was forsaken by God. Consider with me for a moment Jesus the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, living in perfect harmony and perfect love and perfect fellowship, more perfect than anything a human, let alone a sinful human like us could experience. Consider the fracture that split the cosmos when God turned away, when the Son of God who was utterly sinless became sin for us, when he was nailed on that cross. God could not help but to look away at the sin that was upon his Son. That momentary fracture in the eternal relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son, was an eternity in and of itself. God had forsaken, had forgotten his Son, Jesus was forgotten for a moment in eternity, so we would be remembered for all eternity...remembered by the only person that really matters...by God himself.

That's why we can pray like this psalmist, no matter what we're going through, "God, remember your word, remember your promise, remember me." And he does and he will because of Jesus.

Do you have that? Do you have that great confidence? You can and you should, if you repent and turn from your sin and trust and place your hope in Jesus.

Let's pray.