

Will You Grow in God's Word?

Do you want to learn more about the Bible? How would you describe your relationship with God's Word? A pastor I know suggested we might fall into one of five categories. First, you might be happy with what you know, and don't think you need more. Maybe you think this way about school—I learned all about algebra back in high school, or ancient history, or grammar—and I don't want to study that any more. Some people think about the Bible this way—I went through confirmation class, I “graduated,” now I'm done with that studying.

Or maybe you learned about the Bible, and now you're afraid to learn any more. Maybe God's Law pricked your conscience once upon a time, and you're afraid that if you keep studying the Bible, God just might make you feel downright guilty.

Maybe you would like to learn more about the Bible, but things keep getting in the way. I don't have time. It's too hard. There are so many other great things to do in life. Sure, I'll read the Bible, after I'm done scrolling through my Facebook feed, or reading whatever it is.

Maybe you feel guilty about not reading the Bible—and then that paralyzes you, keeping you from concentrating on God's Word.

Or, maybe you are happy with what you have learned in the Bible, and you want to continue to learn more. That is the attitude King David had about God's Word, as he says in our Psalm. He wanted to learn more of God's Word and follow it happily, because the Word of God gave him life. Will you Grow in God's Word?

The first thing David asked for in this section of Psalm 119 is that God keep the Word in David's mind. **“Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes. Then I will guard it to the end. Give me understanding.”** If you are going to follow a set path, first off you have to have it in your mind.

The great problem we have in this life is ignorance. We are ignorant of God's ways. Have you ever gone to another city, maybe walked a few blocks and found yourself completely lost? You don't know which way is the center of the city, or which way to go to get a bite to eat, because it's all new to you.

That's how God's ways can be to us, because we are, every one of us, sinners. The holy God is completely foreign to our thinking.

We see that in so many ways. Just how we imagine this world came to be. Look around, and there is so much evidence of God's working—from the way the temperature is just right to allow crops to grow to the way your immune system is set up to fight illness. The Bible says, “the heavens declare the glory of God.” Look around at nature, it points to the wisdom and goodness of our Creator. Yet we sinful people are tempted to find some other explanations for how this world came to be. Currently there are the “Big Bang theory” and the theory of evolution. In another hundred years there may be some other theories. The Bible, written by God's inspiration, lays out how God made this universe for us to live and prosper in, but we want to come up with some other explanation.

We also are ignorant of God's laws for our lives. Instead, we think we should be selfish; some people even make a virtue out of cheating others so they can get ahead. Living for others seems so foreign.

Do you remember the comic strip character, Charlie Brown? One Christmas he kept hearing from Lucy all about her "Git list"—the list of what she was hoping to "git." Charlie Brown asked, "What about your Give list?" Lucy asked what that would be. "The list of all the things you are going to give to others," he said. Lucy then walked away, saying, "You're weird, Charlie Brown." Living to serve others seems weird to us.

And when we do serve others, we can do it with the wrong attitude. We can become self-righteous—when I'm serving, I look down on others. Even helping out at church, we might be tempted to look down on those others who aren't doing what I'm doing. We're ignorant of God's law.

And we're ignorant of what our God does for us: for instance, why God takes care of us. "God helps those who help themselves"—have you said that before? Maybe you even thought that was right out of the Bible—except that it's not. Scripture says that God helps us, not because of anything we do, but simply because he loves us.

Worst of all, we can be ignorant of how God saves us. If we think that we are saved by being good, that we could somehow be good enough to get to heaven, then we have completely missed the point of God's Word.

As we study the Bible, we see the truth God has for us. We read his laws, which tell us the right path to follow. And we read the gospel, the Good News that God saved us through the sacrifice of his own Son. God teaches us these truths so that we are set firmly on the right path, the way of his statutes.

And with our minds set right, then our feet will follow. **"Give me understanding, and I will guard your law. I will keep it with all my heart. Make me walk on the path of your commandments, for I take pleasure in it."**

James wrote, What good is it if you see a starving person and say, 'I wish you well,' but don't help him out? But once we understand God's love for us, we are ready to do what he says throughout life. We not only are thinking right, we actively choose to live selflessly. And we do this with joy. **"Make me walk on the path of your commandments, for I take pleasure in it."** It isn't a burden to follow God's ways; we enjoy it.

Not only our minds and feet, but even our hearts are changed by God's Word. **"Direct my heart toward your testimonies and not toward material gain. Keep my eyes from looking at worthless things."** Some people might follow the Bible as long as it doesn't interfere with a material lifestyle, focused on your "git list." But God turns our hearts and eyes away from what we want. For in Christ he gives us everything we need.

Why will we want to follow God's Word joyfully? Because of all that the Lord gives us. His Word spells it out.

"Give me life according to your ways." God has his plans that end in eternal life. Our Second Lesson today runs through God's ways: God predestined us. Before eternity God chose us to be saved, purely by his grace. Those he predestined, he called—God opened your heart to believe the Good News of Jesus Christ. Those he called, he justified, that is, he said, "Not

Guilty.” That’s his verdict on your life. Those he justified, he glorified. Your eternal future is secure.

In Jesus, you are not the bad fish that will be sorted out and thrown into the fire. By trusting in Jesus, God sees you as good. On the Last Day his angels will gather you into to heaven.

In the meantime, our Psalm says, God will bless you. **“Confirm your sayings to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away my disgrace which I dread, for your judgments are good.”** God will fulfill his promises, like his promise to make all things work out for your good. Even this coronavirus, God will make that work out for your eternal good, using it to strengthen your faith on the path he laid out. And he will take away all disgrace, from the slander others throw at you to the disgrace of your sin, so that you can be confident to stand in the final judgment.

“How I long for your precepts! Give me life in your righteousness.” We have been renewed in the image of Christ, so we live in the righteousness of Christ.

Schools are starting up again soon, one way or another. When one applies at a college, sometimes the admissions counselor will ask, Why did you want to come to this school? A clever student might give an answer that makes him or her look good—something like, “I hope to become a well-rounded person, and I know your school will help me become that.”

In this Psalm, David talks about enrolling in God’s school. But he doesn’t give some fancy answer to impress anyone. Instead, he talks about what is missing in his life, what only God can give: The certainty of salvation and eternal life, and the willingness to live a life worthy of the Lord. These things come from studying the Bible.

Will You Grow in God’s Word? Amen.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes. Then I will guard it to the end. Amen.