

Living with the Bible

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- [0 : 0 0] What a comfort to gather around the Word of God and to know that when the earth is being shaken, we have a Word from heaven. So we're going to turn to our Bibles now and to our reading from this morning, familiar from Psalm 119 that Edward has been leading us through on these Sunday evenings of late.
- And we're going to read together this morning, beginning at verse 97. Oh, how I love your law. It's my meditation all the day.
- Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. I have more understanding than my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.
- I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way in order to keep your Word.
- I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.
- [1 : 1 4] Through your precepts, I get understanding. Therefore, I hate every false way. Amen.
- And may God bless to us his Word. Well, good morning, everybody. And let's turn in our Bibles, if you have a Bible to hand, to Psalm 119, the section beginning at verse 97.
- And my title for today is Living With the Bible. And I've chosen that title because of what the psalmist writes in verses 97 and 98.
- In verse 97, he says, Oh, how I love your law. It is my meditation all the day. And then we have something very similar in verse 98.
- Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. All the day, ever with me. This man lives with the Bible.
- [2 : 2 0] The Bible is his constant companion. It clearly plays a major part in his life. No doubt there were other major elements in his life. For example, his family, his work, his friendships, his meeting with the Lord's people.
- But the words of the Lord are the dominant influence in his life. I meditate on your law all the day, he says. Your commandment is ever with me.
- Well, now let me ask this question. What are the dominant features in our lives? What people, what activities, what concerns do we find ourselves giving frequent attention to?
- Well, let me name a few of the most popular. Our families. If we're married, there'll be a spouse and perhaps children. Siblings. Parents. Grandparents.
- Our work. Its joys and its frustrations. Especially the frustrations. Then there's the kitchen. Food. The fridge. Money. The bank balance. Pressure relievers.
- [3 : 2 4] We haven't got too many of those at the moment. But I'm thinking of things like watching a film. Going to a concert. Going on a holiday. The dog. The cat. Christian friends. Friends who are not Christians.
- Church. Sport. Music. And sources of anxiety. These are the dominant features in our lives. Our minds are often turning to these things inevitably.

Well, we have to think about them. We live in the real world. And these are things that demand our attention. But where is the Bible in all that mix? Is it our constant companion in the way that our psalmist writes about it in verses 97 and 98?

The psalmist is teaching us here that it is crucially important to elevate the Bible into a position of dominance. Because it transforms life for the better.

And as we look at these verses together. And as we look at these verses together. I hope they will act as a powerful incentive to us to read the Bible. To enjoy the Bible. To devour the Bible. To love the Bible.

[4 : 27] To obey the Bible. Until eventually we are aware that it is our constant reference point. And the decisive shaping influence in our thinking and conduct.

Now we are bound to ask a very practical question at this point. We look at verse 97 and verse 98. And we ask. But how can I meditate on God's words all the day?

How can the Bible be ever with me? Well, of course we have 101 other things to attend to each day. There are chores. There is work. Communicating with other people. And so on.

We can't be reading Matthew's gospel while we are sorting out the firm's accounts. We can't be singing a psalm while we are paying for the groceries at the checkout. The psalmist also, we can be sure, had to give his attention to his chores, his family and his work.

Nobody can have their nose in an open Bible all the day long. So surely what he means is that he has his nose in the scriptures for a portion of each day.

[5 : 29] And for the rest of the day his mind is often returning to those scriptures and thinking about them. They become his preoccupation. His reference point.

He begins to see all the practical decisions that he has to take in the light of the Bible's teaching. It's the Bible that will give him a red light on some decisions.

A green light on others. Perhaps an amber light on others. Think of a compass which will guide you on a long hike in the hills. Especially in misty weather when you can't see far ahead of you.

The needle of that compass will always return to magnetic north. It's drawn there irresistibly. And that's why you're able to follow a steady course and not get lost and fall into a bog.

Now the Bible becomes our magnetic north. And our minds, like the compass needle, keep returning to it. And we are kept steady. We can make moral decisions with confidence.

[6 : 27] The Bible keeps us from falling into moral quicksands. It enables us to plot a steady course through life. And to live life without being afraid. Or falling into superstitions.

You never have to say touch wood if you're a serious Bible reader. So the second half of verse 97 is there as an example to all of us.

And as a great encouragement to follow suit. Look at these words again. It is my meditation all the day. The psalmist is saying, I keep on thinking about the Bible.

And you, my reader, also seek to have the same mindset. Let the words of God fill your mind. And they will be an incalculable blessing for you. Now we do need to hear this message today.

Professor Don Carson, who has his finger very firmly on the pulse of the worldwide church, has written recently that biblical illiteracy is a growing phenomenon, not simply in the non-Christian world, where you wouldn't expect the Bible to be much read, but in the ranks of the church.

[7 : 35] In other words, many people who really are Christians are not learning to be serious Bible readers. What does act as the magnetic north for many people these days, including perhaps many Christians?

Well, let me rewrite verse 97. Oh, how I love my iPhone. It is my meditation all the day. Now, that's not true of everybody.

I know that. And I realize and fully acknowledge that the iPhone is a very useful tool of communication. It does convey very real benefits. But I suspect that many Christians give a lot more time and attention to their iPhones than to their Bibles.

So the iPhone, rather than the Bible, becomes the go-to activity. The mind is drawn to it, almost sucked into it many times a day. I must go there.

I haven't looked at it for 20 minutes. I fear that I might be missing out on some important information. It can create a sense of anxiety. It can become a kind of addiction.

[8 : 38] The mirror in which you see your own life and compare it with other people's lives. And the mind can become anxious and diminished by this activity. Whereas the Bible expands our minds and fills them with the truth that sustains the world.

Now, back to our text. God's law, verse 97, is the psalmist's meditation all the day. And God's commandment, verse 98, is ever with him.

Well, let's dig into these verses now and see how living with the Bible brings extraordinary blessings into the psalmist's life and how it will bring the same blessings into our lives.

And it may just be in these strange days that we're living in at the moment, unable to get to church meetings in the ordinary way, perhaps for weeks or even months. It may be that the Lord is giving us a special extraordinary opportunity to get more deeply acquainted with our Bibles in the quietness of our own homes.

We may have to experience a lot of quietness at home in these coming weeks. Well, let's notice two things. I've got two main points to make. First of all, living with the Bible creates love for the Bible.

[9 : 51] Verse 97, Oh, how I love your law. I love it. That's a declaration of love. Meditating on it all the day creates love for God's words.

Now, when you think about it, loving somebody's words is the same thing as loving the one who speaks them. Because the words are the expression of the heart and mind of the person who speaks them.

For example, a young man might say to the girl that he's falling in love with. Now, imagine a telephone conversation taking place. He's speaking to her. And he says to her, Oh, just say those beautiful words again.

I just can't get enough of them. Say them again. All right, she says, I will. I'll be on the 547 from Glasgow Central and I'll bring the raspberry jam with me.

Say it again. I just love hearing your voice. You see, he loves the voice because he loves the person it belongs to. The words expressed are the person expressed.

[10 : 53] The fundamental commandment in the book of Deuteronomy, the commandment Jesus calls the first and greatest, is the commandment, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength.

And as we come to love him more and better understand his ways, his will, and his plan, inevitably, we come to love his words more. Because his words are him.

His mind and heart expressed in a language that we can understand. So in the first half of verse 97, our psalmist is saying to God, I love your words because I love you.

That great commandment of Deuteronomy has gripped me. I can't get enough of your words because I can't get enough of you. It's the language of love. Oh, how I love your law.

That's why I meditate on it all the day. That's why my mind keeps on returning to it. Now, it's interesting that there are very few places in the Bible where anybody says directly to the Lord, I love you.

[11 : 58] David says it once, once to my knowledge. And it's the first verse of Psalm 18. He says, I love you. Oh, Lord, my strength. Peter says it to Jesus.

Remember that incident recorded in John's gospel, chapter 21. Jesus has now been raised from the dead. Peter has gone fishing with a few of the, a few of his friends. And after breakfast, they come and find Jesus on the beach and have breakfast with him.

And after breakfast, Jesus takes Peter almost by the arm and walks him along the beach. And he says to Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And Peter says, he's hanging his head.

Rather. He says, yes, Lord, you know, I love you. He's feeling ashamed of himself because only a week or two previously, he had denied that he even knew Jesus. His courage had turned to water and he'd feared for his own safety and perhaps his life.

Well, the Lord Jesus forgave him and reinstated him and then extracted from him the words, yes, Lord, I love you. Now, the Bible repeatedly speaks of the Lord God loving his people and of Jesus loving his people.

[13 : 05] But for a person to say to the Lord, I love you is rare in the Bible, but it's right at the heart of Christianity. I love you, Lord. Can you say that?

I love your words. Oh, how I love your law. Christianity is much more than a love affair, but it's never less than a love affair.

Love, two way love is right at the heart of the relationship between God and those who belong to him. It's not a soft love. All real love is characterized by commitment.

Just think of married love for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health till death do us part. It's that kind of love. It's full of determination, but it's love.

Verse 103 draws out the meaning of verse 97 further. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

[14 : 06] Now, that verse makes the point that God's words are not merely intellectual. They're not only given to us to form our thinking, to form our intellectual grasp of truth.

They're also given to us to delight us and to give us pleasure. Verse 103 pictures us eating them, not just thinking them. Anyone who thinks that the Bible is nothing but a book of dry cerebral truth has not begun to enjoy the Bible.

Just look at the phrases here in verse 103. My taste, my mouth, sweeter than honey. Jeremiah, Jeremiah, the prophet once said to the Lord God, your words were found and I at them and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.

For I'm called by your name. Oh, Lord God of hosts. So God's words became to Jeremiah a joy and a delight because he was called by God's name.

God's name was upon him. He belonged to the Lord God. He had taken his name. And so God's words were like steak and onions and strawberries and cream to the prophet.

[15 : 16] A joy and a delight. Sweeter than honey. And this can be our experience too. Don't just read the words of God. Feast upon them.

Let it be like a banquet. Imagine that this happens to all of us occasionally, but just imagine you've been invited out to a really fine upmarket restaurant. You go to your table.

And as you sit down, you realize there is a real heavy grade linen tablecloth on the table. You know the sort. You like to touch it. Feel it with your fingers. You sit down. You're given a real linen table napkin.

The sort that has a pattern woven into it. You put it up under your chin. A bit like Hercule Poirot. The cutlery is beautiful. It's sparkling clean. The glasses are beautifully clean.

You have a serious knife and fork. Then the food comes. And it's beautifully cooked. And there's plenty of it. Now let's come to our Bibles like that.

[16:15] Sweet to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth. We're not just anxiously stuffing our heads with doctrine. We're reading the words of love from the one who loves us.

Let's not hurry over them. Let's enjoy them. So there's the first thing. Living with the Bible creates love for the Bible. And loving the Bible is an expression of loving the Lord himself.

It's not a soft love. But it's a deep and real love. Now second. Living with the Bible develops our wisdom and our understanding.

And this is what verses 98, 99 and 100 are all about. Verse 98. Wiser than my enemies. Verse 99. More understanding than all my teachers.

And verse 100. More understanding than the aged. Well we'll take these three verses in order. First verse 98. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies.

[17:16] Why? For it is ever with me. Now this is encouraging and perhaps rather surprising. Because we can look at enemies of the gospel. Some of whom might even be personal enemies of ours.

On account of our faith. We can look at the enemies and we can feel tempted to be cowed by them. To be browbeaten by them. Because they can seem to be so clever. So street wise.

We can suspect that they know better than we do. How to turn the world's opportunities to their advantage. We realize too. That they haven't signed up to the Bible's ethical teaching.

They're not so concerned as we are. To be truthful and honest. We feel that they may ride roughshod over us. And squash us in some way. Leaving us feeling naive.

And defenseless and beaten. But no. Says our psalmist. The Lord's words make the believer wiser than his enemies. Why? Because the Lord's words are ever with the believer.

[18:14] Teaching him what the world is really like. This means that the Bible taught believer. Understands better than his enemies do. How the world really operates. He knows that in the end.

Truthfulness and integrity. Pay a better dividend. Than dishonesty and selfishness. To know the world's maker. Is to know how the world works. So the enemies of the believer.

They may think that they have him cornered. And defeated. But they don't. He escapes their clutches. And triumphs over them. Then secondly verse 99.

I have more understanding. Than all my teachers. For your testimonies. Are my meditation. Now you won't be surprised. To hear me say that. This verse turns my thoughts.

To the Cornhill training course classroom. And as some of you will know. Our regular practice in the classroom. Is to hold sermon classes. Every Monday. And every Wednesday afternoon. And what happens is.

[19:13] That one of the students. Prepares a Bible sermon. Delivers it in class. In front of the class. And we then spend. Quite a long time. Maybe 45 minutes. Discussing it. And feeding back.

Comments to the student. Now the quality. Of these practice sermons. Varies a great deal. As you would expect. But I can think of. A number of occasions. When my colleagues.

My teaching colleagues. And I. Have been discussing sermon class. At the end of the afternoon. And one of us tutors. Has said to the other. Do you know. I heard Jimmy Snaggs. Preach this afternoon. And my jaw.

Simply dropped. Open. There was a depth. Of clarity. And understanding. Which far outstripped. My own understanding. I've known that passage. For decades. But I had never seen.

The truth. That Jimmy opened up. This afternoon. You see. He'd overtaken. His teacher. He had more understanding. Than his teacher. As verse 99. Puts it. Why?

[20 : 07] Well the verse. Tells us. Because God's testimonies. Had been his. Meditation. His source of understanding. Had not just been. His teacher's lectures.

Or various books. That he might have read. He went to the real. Primary source of understanding. Namely. The Lord's testimonies. He had meditated. Upon them. He had turned them.

Over and over. In his mind. Like a cow. Chewing the cud. And they began to yield up. Their glory. And their excellence. James Philip. Our minister's father.

Used to say this. The scriptures. Will not yield their treasures. To chance. Enquiry. But the student. Who seriously. Meditates.

On the Lord's words. Will end up. With more understanding. Than all his teachers. As verse 99. Puts it. Then thirdly. Verse 100. I understand more.

[21 : 02] Than the aged. For I keep your precepts. In other words. Wisdom. And this is surprising. Because we. We respect the wisdom. Of older people. But wisdom. Does not necessarily.

Lodge in gray heads. In fact. Older people. Who know nothing. Of the Bible. Often find. Their understanding. Of reality. Shrinks. And diminishes. And their horizons.

Shrink down. Into an increasingly. Self-centered view. Of life. Bounded almost. By the four walls. Of their own homes. But let's not miss. The force of verse 100. Why does the psalmist.

Understand. More than the aged. It's because he keeps. The Lord's precepts. He has grasped. Something fundamental. To the life of believers. And it's this. That understanding.

Comes. Not from. Hearing. God's words. But by keeping them. By doing them. By obeying them. This is a great. New Testament theme. This is a great.

[21 : 58] James the apostle. Says in his first chapter. Be doers of the word. Not hearers only. Deceiving yourselves. And the Lord Jesus. Makes exactly this point. There's an occasion.

Told in Luke's gospel. Chapter 11. Where there's a large crowd. And Jesus has been teaching. The crowd. And a woman standing in the crowd. Cries out to him. Blessed is the womb. That bore you.

And the breasts. By which you were nursed. But he replies immediately. Blessed rather. Are those who hear the word of God. And keep it. Understanding.

Is the product of. Obedience. To the Bible's teaching. We only understand. The force and power. Of the Lord's teaching. When we determine. To be obedient children.

If we cast obedience aside. Our understanding. Will shrivel up. Let me illustrate this. How does a young. Christian. Married man.

[22 : 53] Newly married man. Come to understand. The seventh commandment. You shall not commit. Adultery. He comes to understand. That commandment. By keeping it. Year in.

And year out. At the start. Of his married life. He can only understand. It superficially. He knows what it means. He knows the definition. Of adultery. But it's not until.

He puts his marriage vows. Into practice. That promise. Of lifelong fidelity. It's not until. He's been doing that. For some time. That he really. Appreciates. The wisdom and power.

Of the seventh commandment. He'll see other men. Of his own age. Married men. Committing adultery. And he'll begin to see. What it does to them. The pain and ruin.

It causes. The lies. And deceit. And secrecy. The damage done to children. The sorrow. Caused. To parents. And parents in law. And then he looks. At his own wife.

[23 : 47] And appreciates. Her constancy. And fidelity. And he thanks God. For that seventh commandment. He comes to understand. The commandment. Only by keeping it. Now his colleague.

At work. Who's cheating. On his wife. He doesn't understand it. He cannot feel its force. He scoffs at it. Deep down in his heart. He thinks it's just a silly piece.

Of kill joy religion. But the Christian man. Who keeps the commandment. Comes to see that it's an. Integral part. Of a coherent. And stable society.

It's one of the. The building blocks. Of human peace. And happiness. And he realizes. That God has given that. Commandment to him. Not to cramp his life. But to fill it with joy. Way. But he can only come to.

Understand it. By keeping it. God's words. Restrain him from evil. Look at verse 101. I hold back my feet.

[24 : 42] From every evil way. There's temptation there. Isn't there? But he's determined. To hold back his feet. From every evil way. So as to keep the Lord's word. God's words say.

No. Don't go that way. What a blessing. It is that the Lord. It sets red lights. At the top of. Every pathway. To destruction. Verse 102. Makes the same point.

I do not turn aside. From your rules. For you have taught me. And verse 104. Drives the point. Right home. Through your precepts. I get.

Understanding. Therefore. I hate. Every false. Way. I just noticed. That final phrase there. Part of the Bible's wisdom. Is to teach us to hate.

If somebody asks you. Does the Bible teach people. To love. Or to hate. The answer is. Both. And we have both. In this very section. Look at verse 97. How I love your law.

[25 : 39] And then verse 104. I hate. Every false way. So we must learn. To hate. Murder. And adultery. And stealing. And lying. Hate them. The more we love.

God's law. The more we will hate. Everything that contradicts it. And the place to begin directing this hatred. Is the dark recesses. Of our own hearts.

That's where we have to start. Wisdom and understanding in the Bible. Are moral qualities. Rather than intellectual qualities. As the book of Job.

Puts it. To turn away from evil. Is understanding. It's not the reading of a thousand books. That brings understanding. But turning away from evil.

Through your precepts. I get understanding. Therefore I hate. Every false way. So these verses are about wisdom.

[26 : 33] And understanding. Wiser than my enemies. Having more understanding. Than my teachers. And my elders. Well friends. Let me in closing. Just elaborate on this wisdom theme.

For a moment. And ask. How does the wisdom. Derived from the Bible. Help us. In our current predicament. With this global threat. From illness. The Bible.

Fashioned by the wisdom of God. Insists. That it is God. And not man. Who controls history. Now that is not widely believed. In society today.

About 120 years ago. Roughly the year 1900. As the 20th century dawned. There was a powerful. Prevailing sense of optimism. About the future of the human race.

Especially in Europe. And America. And there were reasons for this. There had been great advances. In many ways. During the 19th century. The development of steam ships.

[27 : 30] Replacing the old sailing ships. The discovery of the power of oil. And petrol. As fuel. Great improvements in public health. With the construction of modern sewerage systems.

In our great cities. The proliferation and use of electricity. And great advances in engineering. And medicine. And the earlier forms of technology. And it was seriously believed by people.

That the 20th century. This new century. Would bring an end. To war. Disease. Poverty. And crime. That was seriously believed. A new golden age.

Was confidently forecast. But what did the 20th century bring? The two worst wars. In world history. And the growth of Marxism.

Which led to the slaughtering. Of tens of millions. Of ordinary people. Especially in the Soviet Union. And the People's Republic of China. It was a dreadful century. Unleashing ferocious forms.

[28 : 26] Of hatred. Wickedness. And oppression. And yet. Despite this abysmal track record. In the 20th century. Human beings have continued. To believe.

That we can control everything. Pride. And self-sufficiency. Are our middle names. So we at least have to ask this question. Is God allowing this global illness?

Is God sending this global illness? In order to bring us to our senses. And make us renounce our pride. He once said to Job. Who is the man who can stand before me?

Whatever is under the whole heavens. Is mine. In other words. I decide what happens in this world. Why did he say this to Job? Because Job had been reduced.

By great loss. And serious illness. To a state of abject frailty. And God wanted. Not simply Job. But all who read the book of Job. To understand. That life and death.

[29 : 27] Health and illness. Are his to dispense. As he wills. It's all in his hand. And his hand shapes the world. Not ours. Surely we should pray now.

That the anxiety created by this virus. And the sense of powerlessness. That people are feeling. Should drive many to their knees. Casting themselves. Upon the mercy of God.

Who is more or less. An unknown God. In modern Scotland. Let's pray that this illness. Will drive people to the Bible. Where they will read the good news. That there is hope.

Hope. But it is a hope. Beyond this world. Life in this world. Is not the future. This world. Has been under judgment. Since Adam and Eve. At the forbidden fruit. But Jesus came.

To bring us salvation. That will take us. Out of this sorrowing world. Into a glorious. Enduring. Eternal. New. World. We pin our hopes. Upon the new world.

[30 : 25] Because we pin our hopes. Upon the Savior. Look again. At our psalmist's words. In verses 98 to 100. The Lord's commandments. And testimonies.

And precepts. And rules. Are given to us. To make us wise. The apostle Paul. Draws out this theme. Of wisdom further. In his second letter. To Timothy. Where he writes to Timothy.

From childhood. You've been acquainted. With the sacred writings. That is the precepts. And testimonies. And rules. Which are able. To make you wise. For salvation.

Through faith. In Christ Jesus. That tells us. The ultimate purpose. Of all the sacred writings. All the precepts. And testimonies. Of the Old Testament. To give us.

The most important. Wisdom of all. Which is to put our faith. In the Lord Jesus. For eternal salvation. So let's pray. That God. In his mercy.

[31 : 20] Will use this global pandemic. To humble. Our proud hearts. And to lead many. From fear. And despair. To faith. The answer. To the world's crisis.

Lies. In one place. Only. In Jesus Christ. Who is the savior. Of the world. Let's bow our heads.

And we'll pray together. For God. So loved the world. That he gave. His only begotten son. That whoever.

Believes. In him. Should not perish. But have everlasting life. How we thank you. Dear heavenly father.

For the love. That lies behind. Your sending. Of the Lord Jesus. Your giving of him. Up to death. On the cross. So that there. He might take. All the weight. Of the sins.

[32 : 13] That we had committed. All the weight. Of the rebellion. And mutiny. Of our hearts. So that we should be forgiven. And set free. And given the assurance. That our future. Is not to perish.

Eternally. But to live. Eternally. And we pray. That you will write. This great good news. This wonderful gospel. Deep upon our hearts. And bring us joy.

And peace. And happiness. As we trust you. And we ask it. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.