



COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH

A Love for
God's Word

Daily Scripture Readings

Jan 10 - Feb 20

WEEK 1: BLESSED

Monday, January 10 - Psalm 119:1-8

We begin a journey through the 119th Psalm. You probably already know that Psalm 119 is the longest psalm at 176 verses. It has 22 stanzas of 8 verses going through the entire Hebrew alphabet. Each line in each stanza starts with the same letter. This poem/song/psalm is a remarkable achievement in creativity that is sadly lost in translation.

The psalm in its original form focuses upon the Law, the Torah, being the guide of one's life. We study this psalm over the next two months to remind ourselves that the Bible, God's Word, is to be trusted and loved as a guide for our lives. The poem is an acrostic for this reason. The structure of the poem reminds us that full and complete obedience is necessary to God's word "from A to Z."

The eight verses we read today, the *Aleph* section, communicates that the writer of this psalm, and, in turn, those who read and believe the words written, continue to seek God for all of our days. When a person seeks God continually, their life is blessed. Some of our translations will use the word happy in verses 1 and 2, but blessed is the better translation. In our English language, happy is too fleeting, it is too contingent on daily happenings. Blessed, however, is not contingent on circumstances but on God. We will see later in the psalm that days are not always happy in this world, but they certainly can always be blessed by God. When we walk in the ways of the Lord and seek Him with our whole heart, we are blessed. The reading of God's Word is the main way we can seek the will of God. We are blessed when we know God's Word and practice His Word daily.

Tuesday, January 11 - Deuteronomy 6:16-25

We will not go straight through Psalm 119, but each week will be broken into sections corresponding to the themes seen throughout the psalm. Our reading in Deuteronomy corresponds with the first two verses of Psalm 119.

When you do what is good in the eyes of the Lord, you will be blessed. Of course, this does not mean that you will become rich or receive a surplus of material possessions or have everything come easy to you. What it does mean is you will be blessed within your Spirit. You will have a “peace which surpasses understanding” as Paul writes in Philippians.

When you read Psalm 119, there is a deep love for the Scriptures clearly seen. This type of love needs to be instilled in every one of our hearts. The second half of our passage today reminds us that knowing Scripture is important so that we can pass that knowledge/experience of God’s Word to the next generation. There is an assumption made starting in verse 20. Do you see it? The assumption is that the children ask the question because they know of the commands of the Lord upon you but do not understand them. In order to ask the question, the children must see their elders with the “decrees, statutes, and ordinances” to know they are important.

If we want the next generations to know that the Bible is important, then they need to see us studying God’s Word. If we want the opportunity to share the story of God’s love with others, they must know that we live our lives according to God’s Word. The children can’t ask questions they don’t know they are supposed to ask. Is your life prompting people to ask you questions about God?

Wednesday, January 12 - Malachi 1:1-5

We resume Prayer Meeting and Bible Study this morning and begin a study of Malachi. Malachi can be broken into “six disputations.” Each disputation, or argument, will be the theme for each of the next six Wednesdays. These six debates taken together, question the role of Israel in the world and question worship in the Temple during the early days of the 5th century B.C.

The first question or concern described in Malachi 1:1-5 is “How have you loved us?”, us being Israel originally. Sadly, I find that the majority of us relate to

this question. We live in a “what have you done for me lately world.” The smallest problem arises and we are ready to tear our clothes, put on the sackcloth, and cover our heads in ashes. Israel has the gall to ask God “do you even love us anymore?” Malachi 1:2-5 answers Israel’s question. It also helps us to realize that God still loves his people, and that every small problem does not mean that God has left us nor forsake us.

Thursday, January 13 - Psalm 119:9-16

There are two types of revelation: special and general. (As an aside, all revelation means is unveiling. It doesn’t necessarily mean anything about “end times”). Special revelation is an unveiling of God that you alone experience. This is the audible voice of God people sometimes hear or the soft voice which appears in your thoughts. Special revelations are dreams that people have that can only come from God.

General revelation is the unveiling of God for the entire world to see. General revelation is found in the beauty of God’s creation. It is found in the experiences all of us can have in this world that includes the reading of God’s Word. You don’t need a special revelation for God to reveal to you what he already has told you in the Bible!

I love the way verse 11 describes the desire for Scripture. We treasure God’s Word, we instill its commands in our lives for a greater purpose. The purpose of knowing God’s Word is so that we do not sin against God. As we focus attention on Psalm 119 over the next several weeks, looking at the theme of taking the Bible seriously, let us not lose sight that the Bible is not our object of worship. It is the vehicle which helps us grow closer to the God who is our object of worship. Never forget that.

Are you treasuring God’s Word in your heart just because, or are you treasuring God’s Word so that you can be closer to God? Are you reading and

meditating on the Bible because “that’s what I’m supposed to do,” or are you studying the Bible to deepen your relationship with the Lord? What motivates you to read the Bible?

Friday, January 14 - Jeremiah 31:31-34

Picking up where we left off yesterday, we see the announcement of a New Covenant in Jeremiah in which it is proclaimed that as part of this new covenant, the Law will be written on the hearts of men and women so that it is no longer necessary to teach one another because everyone will already “know the Lord.”

The connection between Jeremiah 31:33, Psalm 119:11, and Jesus is important for us as Christians to recognize. Psalm 119:11 is talking about the Scriptures; however, Jeremiah 31:33 is talking about something else which will be inside the hearts of God’s people, forgive their iniquity, and pay for their sin. This, of course, is where our trust and faith in Jesus, not the Law, becomes clear. While we desire to follow the Law because of our love for Christ, the Law doesn’t save us. Paul reminds us in Romans that the Law convicts us of our sin and God’s grace saves us from sin.

As the people in Jeremiah’s day were being exiled, God issued a promise: this is not the end for Israel. This is a new beginning. God declares that He is still God, still in control, and still loves them. Yes, even though the old covenant was broken, the Law was not followed, God gave them another chance. Yes, even though they committed spiritual adultery against God, He still gave them forgiveness.

He does the same for us. Even when we don’t follow the laws of Christ as we should, God still loves us. Even when we don’t light our path with God’s Word, God forgives us. Take time today to praise God for his forgiveness and love. Remember these words from Romans 5:8: “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Thanks be to God!

Saturday, January 15 - John 2:1-11

As most of you know, my favorite Bible verse is Micah 6:8. It has been my favorite verse for most of my adult life. I think it is a succinct representation of what God's people are supposed to do while on this earth. Before LeeAnn and I were married and before Micah 6:8 was my favorite verse, LeeAnn told me that if we ever had a son, she liked the name Micah. My favorite verse and her fondness for the name Micah were not connected in any way. Early in 2015, of course, we learned we were having a son, and we knew we would name him Micah. He was born on 6/8/2015. He is Micah 6/8. I believe in such an amazing coincidental way, God worked that out for my enjoyment. It wouldn't have made a difference what date he was born on, but God puts a smile on my face every time I think about Micah 6:8 being my son and his birthday.

Once upon a time, our devotion on Saturday was focused upon the Sunday Evening Worship text. We get back to that starting today. Tomorrow night, we will study Jesus' first miracle at the Wedding in Cana. This miracle that Jesus performs saves people from a great social faux pas. But at the end of the day, nobody is healed, nobody is fed, nobody is even saved. Barely anyone knows that Jesus did this. The miracle barely registers to the people at the wedding, and it certainly did not make an eternal difference. It is in this miracle and in the happenstance of my son's birthday that we see how much God wants us to enjoy life. The miracle of turning water to wine extends the party. The miracle brings enjoyment to the wedding guests. God not only allows this enjoyment but he provides it! God wants us to enjoy life, even if today's enjoyment doesn't make a grand eternal difference. Go out and enjoy life today!

Sunday, January 16 - Psalm 120

Psalms 120-134 are the Psalms of Ascent. These would be psalms the people would sing as they journeyed to Jerusalem for the Holy Festivals throughout the year. Let them be psalms that you read and sing as you prepare for worship this Sunday!

WEEK 2: HOLD ON TO GOD'S WORD

Monday, January 17 - Psalm 119:17-24

Jeremiah must have lived a pretty lonely life. A really difficult episode in Jeremiah's life is described in Jeremiah 36. During those days, God told Jeremiah to write down all that he had prophesied concerning "Israel, Judah, and all nations" (Jer. 36:2). So Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, get to work on writing the entire collection of Jeremiah's sermons from the past 25 years. After its completion, Baruch goes and reads the scroll in the Temple (Jeremiah is banned from the Temple). Following this reading, Baruch goes and reads the scroll in the Palace. Then Baruch and Jeremiah have to flee for their safety, while the king takes the scroll, the chronicle of Jeremiah's sermons and burns it. Then, God tells Jeremiah to start over and create another scroll.

Sometimes we get as frustrated as Jeremiah must have been frustrated. We are doing the work of the Lord and it is being destroyed or hindered by those who act contrary to God's will. Sometimes we feel "as aliens in the land" like Psalm 119:19 says. Are we the only people following God's rule and reign?

Let us always remember we are never alone. That's why it's so important to be part of a church family, To be part of a Bible study who can encourage us when we are feeling alone. We are better together than we can ever be apart.

Even if we feel isolated, let us follow the lead of the writer of Psalm 119 who says "even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes" (v. 23). There are those in the world who would love to see

Christianity fail. There are those who love to see Christians falter. Don't give them the enjoyment of seeing that. Don't fall into the traps of the world, but "remain steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your hard work in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Even if in this world your hard work is taken, like Jeremiah's was, and burned, don't let that stop you from doing the work of the Lord. Just get back up and start working again.

Tuesday, January 18 - Psalm 119:25-32

Have you ever wanted to give up? Nick Vujicic did as a boy. Nick was born in 1982 without arms or legs. Growing up, this caused physical, verbal, and psychological abuse which led to depression and Nick attempting suicide. Thankfully, Nick persevered, overcoming his difficulties to become a motivational speaker. Today, Nick Vujicic is an Evangelist who started an evangelistic organization called "Life without Limbs" which tells people about the hope that can be found in Christ. He is married and has four kids.

Our psalmist felt close to death as he wrote this stanza of Psalm 119. His soul clinged to the dust he says in verse 25. He needed reviving. There's only one source which can truly revive our souls and that is, of course, God. What does it feel like when we are spiritually dead or close to it? It feels like you are in a fog. Your spiritual sight is hindered from seeing God. Your vision is clouded and you do not see the world as God made it. But God can take that fog away. He can revive you with his Word. He can give you strength and faithfulness. He can put the breath of life in you and give you the reason to live.

Let us not cling to the dust, meaning death. Let us, instead, cling to the decrees of the Lord, which give life. Let us meditate on the wondrous works of the Lord.

Wednesday, January 19 - Malachi 1:6-2:9

This section of Malachi is the largest of the six disputations in the book. This second argument condemns the priesthood for not honoring God in their work. Key evidence of their dishonor is accepting imperfect animal sacrifices. God considers it an insult when we do not give him our best. When we give him the leftovers of our time and resources instead of the firstfruits, we have turned away from the commands of the Lord.

How important is it to you that you give your best to God? How important is it to you that you are prepared to be at your best in times of worship, Bible study, and prayer? What is the quality of what you are offering to God? Spend time in prayer considering these questions and consider how you can bring quality to God, not just quantity.

Thursday, January 20 - Psalm 119:33-40

Being a good teacher is extremely difficult. One of the most frustrating experiences I can remember as a student was my first semester of Physics while a Junior in High School. My teacher had taught for over thirty years. He excelled in the field of physics much more than the typical high school Physics teacher. He truly was very smart and knew the information. But he was unable to communicate his knowledge to 15 and 16 year olds. It was a truly difficult semester because I knew he knew the subject matter, but he couldn't describe it in a way to help us understand.

To be a good teacher, you must know what you are talking about then be able to help others understand too. Verses 33-34 describe God in this way. It is one thing to teach His children the law and statutes; it is another thing to get His children to understand the law and statutes. God does both. Do you notice the difference in the results of teaching and understanding? If I tell my kids, "don't touch the stove," I hope they will listen and follow the rules without explanation.

However, if I tell my kids, “don’t touch the stove because it is hot and you’ll get burned,” I have explained the situation in the hopes that they understand. When one teaches, she talks to someone’s brain and wants simple obedience. When one gives understanding, she talks to someone’s heart and wants long term commitment.

The Bible is not just a list of rules without explanation. It is not just God saying “do this and don’t do that.” There are laws and statutes to follow, but there is also explanation, stories of God’s people obeying and disobeying, and stories of God’s grace and mercy. God does not only teach, but He gives understanding. I thank God for His Word which can help us understand why God requires us to live a certain way.

Friday, January 21 - Psalm 119:41-48

Eighteen years ago, I tried out for the 5A Texas All-State Band on baritone saxophone. I had made the All-Region band a month previous which allowed me to try out for All-State. Over the Christmas break that year, I practiced my music for 90 minutes a day. I knew that music better than anything. Every day, I would take different parts of the music and play it over and over again. I would slow the notes down and speed them up. It didn’t matter that I basically had the music memorized, I still practiced every day.

We know the story of God backwards and forwards it seems. We’ve read the Bible for decades. Every single day, we are supposed to read God’s Word. Sometimes our readings are repetitive. As we reach the end of week 2 of studying Psalm 119, we might be finding the stanzas repetitive. But repetition is how we go from learning something in our heads to learning it in our hearts. When we read over and over again about the beauty of the Law, we start to let that message seep deep down into our soul. We start to feel the Word of God instead of reading the Word of God.

Let this be an encouragement to you that there is a reason to continue reading through this Psalm even if it seems like “I read the same thing yesterday!” There is a benefit to reading the words over and over again. Let them wash over you. Find delight in God’s commandments because you love them! Meditate on His statutes.

Saturday, January 22 - Luke 4:14-21

In the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He is able to do amazing things through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is loved by everyone for his teaching in the synagogue, except in Nazareth. It’s hard to say why exactly “no prophet is accepted in his hometown,” but we can imagine why. Is Mary Alice going to be listening to your preaching or thinking about how she rocked you in the nursery? Is Abraham going to hear God speak through you or think about how you knocked over the potluck table when playing with your friends? This is why they can’t accept his teaching. All they are thinking is “isn’t this Joseph’s boy?”

I think it would be wise for us to learn from the mistakes of the Nazarenes. Do not judge the outside of the messenger, but judge the message. Do not consider the past of the preacher, but consider the present words. They missed the message because they couldn’t get past the fact that this was Joseph’s son. Don’t miss out because the message isn’t packaged like you think it should be.

Sunday, January 23 - Psalm 121

WEEK 3: REFLECTION ON GOD’S WORD

Monday, January 24 - Psalm 119:49-56

What brings you comfort? When both of my kids were babies, they slept in a “sleep-sack.” Instead of having blankets in their cribs which they would have trouble getting under in the middle of the night, these sacks are like a sleeping

bag that they'd wear. Once they got older, they stopped using the sleep-sack and graduated to a regular bed with normal sheets and blankets. When this transition happened with Micah, we realized how attached he had become with his sleep-sacks. He needed them to sleep. When he was upset or sick, he wanted to hold on to them. He still sleeps with them and holds on to them when he's anxious today. His sleep-sacks give him comfort.

The Psalmist reflects on God's Word by saying that it is what gives him comfort in times of distress. Why would this be the case? In the Bible, we realize that we live in God's Story. And we know that God is sovereign and in control. When we look at the world, all we see is chaos, but in the Bible, we see God acting amidst the chaos. This is comfort in tumultuous times.

Where do you turn for comfort when the days are hard? Do you turn to Scripture or elsewhere? What is your security blanket when things don't go your way? God's promises or something else? Always trust in God. He will never leave you nor forsake you. God has given us the Bible so that we can learn that He is at work. In times of difficulty, let us reflect on God's Word and "remember [His] name in the night."

Tuesday, January 25 - Psalm 119:57-64

Every summer after we got old enough, my sister and I would stay home all day while both of my parents went to work. Typically, my mom and dad would both be gone before I woke up. Every morning, there would be a list of chores for us to do before they got home that evening. I did not enjoy chores, so I would wait until the very last minute to complete the tasks. It was always done before my parents got home, but usually with only a few minutes to spare. This annoyed my dad so much. He would call us on his lunch break, asking if we had done the chores yet. I always answered honestly, saying not yet, but they'll be done before you get home. He seemed to think we should do our chores immediately.

Psalm 119:60 says “I hurry and do not delay to keep your commandments.” This psalmist hurries to keep the Lord’s commandments because he loves the Law; it gives him comfort. What would it be like for us to hurry and not delay following the commandments of God? Jesus sums up the commandments of God by commanding us to “love God with every fiber of our being and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.”

What can you do this week to not delay in keeping the commandments of the Lord? What can we do as a church in showing this same love for God’s Word? Reflect on these questions today. Write down any thoughts which come to mind and share them with a Christian brother or sister. How can we hurry and not delay in keeping God’s commands today?

We must hurry and not delay. There is a difference between summer chores and serving the Lord. I knew when my parents were coming home. We do not know when the Lord is coming or when we are going home. Do not push to tomorrow what should be done today.

Wednesday, January 26 - Malachi 2:10-16

There is some dispute over what exactly Malachi is talking about when it states “I hate divorce, says the Lord.” Is it talking about husbands and wives or is marriage/divorce a metaphor for worshipping of foreign gods? We can discuss this particular issue further during Bible Study.

The overall disputation focuses on our relationship with God and with others. The issue is that we are corrupting relationships which were meant to be beautiful and holy. You don’t have to look far to realize the idolatry and adultery which pervades our culture. Marriages are broken. People’s relationships with God are non-existent. We may think that this is a new phenomenon, but the writings of Malachi show us that broken relationships have been a problem for a very long time.

How is your relationship with God? Is it as strong as it could be? Are there idols in your life which you need to repent of? What steps can you take to protect your relationship with God so that you can keep your relationship with God pure?

Thursday, January 27 - Psalm 119:65-72

God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. The goodness of God is the theme of this ninth stanza of Psalm 119. God's goodness has brought the psalmist from a place of pride to a place of humble servanthood. When he was prideful, he went astray, but now that he is humbled, he keeps God's Word.

How difficult would it be for you to utter the words of verse 71: "it is good for me that I was humbled?" Katie Starr Triplet was one of the youngest city councilwomen in St. Louis history at 26 years old when she was elected in 2007. She was ambitious with dreams of becoming mayor of St. Louis. She did good work for the people in her district for 7 years. However, all of that came crashing down in 2014 when it was discovered that Triplet was using her campaign funds to pay for personal expenses. Her political career was over in a blink of an eye. She lost her job, friends, house, and money. She had nothing. But that is not the end of Ms. Triplet's story. Far from it, in fact. In the midst of losing everything, she found love and acceptance in Jesus. She discovered a calling into ministry. She now speaks about the forgiveness of Jesus to any school, prison, or organization who will have her speak. She acknowledges her past sins and trusts in the forgiveness of God. She has gone from worshipping at the idol of prestige and pedigree to worshipping God. Katie Starr Triplet would say "it is good for me that I was humbled."

God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good. Even when we are being humbled, God is using that to build us back up stronger and more faithful to Him. When we are prideful, we go astray, but when we are humbled before the Almighty God, it is good. In the midst of being humbled, the reforming that takes

place can hurt. But it is in that moment, when we truly realize that God is more precious than silver or gold. God is good all the time. And all the time, God is good.

Friday, January 28 - Psalm 119:73-80

Hannah is amazing at using Play-Doh. As a person who still has trouble coloring inside the lines, I'm consistently in wonder at Hannah's ability to make 3D models out of clay. Last Christmas, she was making "Christmas cookies" out of Play-Doh. One cookie was a tree which had perfect circles for ornaments and a different color garland lining the tree. Another cookie was a perfect square present with different color ribbon and a perfectly set bow on top. Then she had a snowman with a top hat, button eyes and a carrot nose. It was remarkable how detailed Hannah was able to be.

Just as Hannah made those Play-Doh shapes, in a much greater way, God has fashioned us with his hands. We belong to God. We are his handiwork, his creation. As such, we have a purpose for being created. We learn the commandments of God in order to be examples to other people. Twice in this stanza (v. 74 and 79), the psalmist wants other people of God to look at him as an example of righteous living. If people looked at you, what would they see? A person who is living a life worthy of the calling of Christ, or someone who is like everyone else? When verse 80 says blameless, we most likely can take that to mean forgiven. Are you living a life that shows you've been forgiven? Are you living in the freedom of forgiveness or slavery of sin? Let us all be examples that people can follow. Let us remember who is our creator and live blameless lives worthy of Him.

Saturday, January 29 - Jeremiah 1:4-10

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...”

Every time I read this line in Jeremiah, it brings me great comfort and joy. Life can be a struggle sometimes. There are tragedies which take place all around us. I'm writing this devotion the week before Christmas. There have been tornadoes which ravaged Kentucky, the omicron variant beginning to wreak havoc across the world, and closer to home, Sam has gone to heaven while several others are sick. I crave no news because it seems like that's the only way I get good news. But then I read Jeremiah 1:5, “before I formed you in the womb I knew you...”

The trials of this life become easier to face when you remember that God knew you even before your mother was pregnant. The difficulty you face becomes easier when you realize that God has you here in this moment for a purpose. “...before you were born I consecrated you.” God knew where you would be and what struggles you would be facing on January 29, 2022 before you took your first breath many years ago.

You are not facing life alone. God has been with you since before the beginning of your life. God knows you and your problems. “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

Sunday, January 30 - Psalm 122

WEEK 4: WISDOM AND DELIGHT IS FOUND IN THE LORD

Monday, January 31 - Psalm 119:81-88

Many years ago, a radio station would do a contest to win a new TV. They would set up at a DFW mall with six lucky participants. All they had to do was sit in a nice recliner and watch TV without falling asleep. The last person awake won the TV. This happened every year and typically the contest would last several

days until a winner would be crowned. People would stay awake as long as they could to win the prize.

Verse 82 cries out to God because the psalmist has been waiting on the Lord and his eyes are failing Him. He is quick to mention that he has not given up on the Lord, but he is growing weak. His eyes are starting to droop and become heavy. He is weak, he is tired, he is worn. He cries out to the Lord “when will you comfort me?”

Maybe you feel like this today. You are tired, you are weak, you are worn. Maybe you are crying out to God “when will you comfort me? Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.” Trust in God in these dire moments. Do not forget his precepts. Do not forget his promise of steadfast love. Your eyes may begin to fail at keeping watch, but the God who loves us never sleeps or slumbers. Keep watch because the Lord indeed will bring comfort when you are tired, weak, and worn.

Tuesday, February 1 - Psalm 119:89-96

“If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery.”

In his Christmas letter to FBC Dallas in 1921, George W. Truett wrote “However harsh some facts of life may seem to be, may we realize that beneath all the bruises and heartaches there is an Omniscient Love that never fails, never forsakes, and never forgets.” It had been a rough few years for people of the world 100 years ago. World War I was still fresh in everyone’s mind. The Spanish Flu Pandemic had killed millions of people. There had been race riots in Chicago and labor strikes across the country. The people of the early 1920s had faced lots of bruises and heartaches.

This life without Christ is a life of misery. Without Christ, this life is overwhelming. War, pandemic, race relations, etc. can leave us feeling uncertain and scared about the future. As people with Christ, we do not need to be

overwhelmed with the troubles of the world. We do not need to perish in our misery or focus on our bruises. We have Christ who has taken away our misery and “by his bruises we are healed.”

Take delight in the Lord and do not focus on misery. That does not mean we deny our heartaches, but it does mean that we focus on, as Truett said, “Love that never fails, never forsakes, and never forgets.”

Wednesday, February 2 - Malachi 2:17-3:5

The problems that have been lamented in the first three weeks of studying Malachi will not last. God will not allow them to continue forever. Questions of God’s love, inadequate priests, and idolatrous Israelites will be judged accordingly.

This fourth disputation invokes the message of the Day of the Lord. On that day, the Lord will purify his priests and people. It is only after the purification that the offerings of the people will be pleasing as they used to be. Let us be clear concerning this event: this is a process of sanctification not justification. Justification is what brings one into the family of God; sanctification is what makes one holy and pure. The message being given is not a message about how to be in the family of God. That task is already complete.

We need to allow ourselves to be in the refiner’s fire and scrubbed with fuller’s soap. Yes, these metaphors show the pain of confession and repentance, but allowing ourselves to be made clean is necessary. Have you allowed God to refine and reform you?

Thursday, February 3 - Psalm 119:97-104

If you want to become president, you must be 35 years old. To be a Senator, the age minimum is 30 and to be in the House of Representatives, the age requirement is 25. Why? As the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution,

their understanding was that someone would grow in wisdom and maturity as they aged. So apparently, you need to be wiser to be a senator than a representative. Think about that next time you watch the news!

This principle of wisdom coming with age has been part of humanity for almost all of our existence. Job questions this principle in Job 12:12: “Is wisdom with the aged, and understanding in length of days?” His answer is immediate and a resounding no: “With God are wisdom and strength; He has counsel and understanding.” Job’s answer is the same as our psalmist in verse 100: “I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.”

When it comes to wisdom, age is irrelevant; our relationship with God is of utmost importance. I have heard more wisdom come from my 6 year old than some people ten times his age because it is God who is speaking through him. Age is just a number when it comes to wisdom. Wisdom does not come from age, but it comes from God.

Friday, February 4 - Psalm 119:105-112

The picture that this stanza creates is important. We all know verse 105 and we recognize the need for light to see where we are going. God’s Word is the light so we are not lost in the darkness. But this stanza is more than just getting lost and getting off track. Look at verse 110 as well: “The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.” What we have is a picture of God’s Word being a light for our path so that when the enemy tries to trap us, we see the trap, and thwart the plan of the enemy. Think of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. Three times, Satan tempts him; three times, Jesus responds with Scripture. Scripture is our light to see the traps Satan has put before us.

Sometimes in our lives, we think we know the path so well that we don’t need light for this part. It’s a well worn path. We’ve walked it many times, we can do it ourselves. A few months ago, right after we had decorated for Christmas, I

walked into the living room in the morning without my glasses on and had not turned on a light yet. I didn't need to see what was in front of me. I knew what was in front of me...or so I thought. However, we had rearranged the furniture to make room for the Christmas Tree and I ran right into an armchair. I almost knocked it over and fell over myself. When we use the light, we are ready for what is in our path. When we think we know the way, the Adversary puts a snare in our way, and we fall in the darkness.

The only way to be ready for whatever will come your way is to let God light your way. Let His words be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. Do not stray from his words and you will be able to walk with confidence with every step.

Saturday, February 5 - Luke 5:1-11

“...They left everything...”

What is everything to you? These first disciples, Simon (Peter), James, and John, left everything to follow Jesus. Nets, boats, family, fish (a lot of money was to be made in those nets, see v. 6), sleep (v. 5), were all left in order to follow Jesus. Simon didn't run home to tell his wife; James and John didn't go and pack a bag. They left everything and followed him.

What is everything to you? A minister I know began adulthood in insurance. He quickly moved his way up in the company, supervising an entire division and hundreds of people. He oversaw a multi-million dollar budget and was well-liked by his employees. But then God called and he answered. He left that job and the lucrative paycheck to become a missionary in Eastern Europe. He continues to serve in ministry, certainly not making anywhere near what he made a lifetime ago. He left everything and followed Jesus.

What is everything to you? Maybe it's family, friends, security, home, or a myriad of other things, but none of those are to be more important than God.

When He calls you to follow Him, you drop everything and go. The disciples left it all behind; what do you need to leave behind to follow Him?

Sunday, February 6 - Psalm 123

WEEK 5: GOD IS WITH US!

Monday, February 7 - Psalm 119:113-120

This is actually the final stanza of the section covered last week. The main theme seen in these eight verses is loyalty and trust toward the Lord and the feeling of safety near Him. Verse 114 introduces a new concept to the psalm: the Lord as a hiding place. There was a movie which premiered in the late 1990s about a an adopted boy who struggles in adjusting with his new family. There was some past trauma in the boy's life which made him shy and silent when around new adults. His new caretaker learned a coping mechanism for this boy. He gave the boy a pair of sunglasses to wear and when wearing these sunglasses, he would feel safe around others.

The world has certainly given us trauma and bad memories. Time and time again in the Bible, we read of the importance of not allowing the past to define us. God doesn't define us by our past; God defines us by whether we have let Jesus be our Savior. God defines us by whether we have gone with him to be safe. Have we made God our shield and allowed God to "hold me up, that I may be safe?"

Have you been too concerned about your past and not allowed yourself to be in the safety of the Lord? Have you hidden behind his shield so as to not feel the brunt of past trauma? If not, go to Him, feel his protection, and be safe.

Tuesday, February 8 - Psalm 119:121-128

There is a turn of tone within the Psalm starting in this stanza. The psalmist has gotten more tense and concerned about oppression and his request for deliverance becomes even stronger. You can hear that in verse 126 when he almost commands the Lord saying “it is time for the Lord to act.” We have truly reached our wit’s end with the world when we say “God, you gotta do something!”

And most of us are at our wit’s end, aren’t we? Basically, we are at a place with the Lord saying “Look God, I trust in you, and I know you are God, and I will follow you all of the days of my life, but this is insane. What are you waiting for?” It’s time we all take a step back. We are not in a position to command what the Lord should do. We must be more humble than that. We must live like verse 125 says “I am your servant; give me understanding.” “Help us, Lord” we must proclaim. “Help us, Lord, to know what you are up to. Give us discernment to understand the Word of God.”

Spend an extended amount of time in prayer today. Have you been demanding of God? Have you been as humble as you should waiting on the Lord’s deliverance? Do you have the heart of a servant or a commander?

Wednesday, February 9 - Malachi 3:6-12

Because the Day of the Lord is coming, as we discussed last week, this section of Malachi can be summed up in one word: repent! There is only one reason that the world even has the opportunity to repent: the Lord does not change. The Lord gives us a love that is unconditional and forever. Even when we stray from the Lord, the Lord is waiting for us and willing to accept us if we return to Him.

In Malachi, the people have strayed from the Lord and this has robbed God. How are they robbing God? We will discuss that during Bible Study. In the same vein, you and I are robbing God when we are unrepented and outside of

the will of God. How so? Give this some thought and I will look forward to discussing with you later this morning!

Thursday, February 10 - Psalm 119:129-136

“Keep my steps steady...”

It seems like it took forever for Hannah to take her first steps. Both of my kids started walking later than average, but Hannah seemed to never want to let go. We walked around the house regularly for what seemed like months. LeeAnn or I would hold on to her hands as she waddled around. Without us holding on, she would fall down. Finally, on a cold Saturday morning in February 2014, she took her first steps on her own and never looked back.

This is a good picture for what the Lord does for us in our walk with Him. Except we never get the hang of walking on our own. Here’s the thing: we aren’t supposed to walk on our own! This life is not meant to live as individuals, but we are to live with Christ holding our hand. We are meant to rely on God to hold us up. We need God to keep our steps steady, to hold on to us so we do not fall.

But here is the other side of the coin. Too often, we don’t want God to hold our hand. We want to be “big boys and girls” and “do it myself.” So we wriggle out of God’s hands and try to run away on our own. And because we aren’t supposed to “do it myself” we fall down and immorality ends up having dominion over us.

God is a good Father who will hold us up always. He will keep our steps steady, but we have to stay with Him. We can’t try to break free on our own. When we try to walk on our own, we fall down.

Friday, February 11 - Psalm 119:137-144

The key word of this stanza is “righteous.” Righteousness indicates that God rules, reigns, and enacts his will on this earth. We agree that God’s action in

this world is right. God's rule and reign is forever and whenever there is conflict between us and God, it is always our fault. "Give me understanding that I may live."

A great example in classical literature of the righteousness of God is seen in Shakespeare. In Act III of Hamlet, the King laments the sin which he has committed. In that moment, he utters these words:

But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my
foul murder"?
That cannot be; since I am still
possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the
murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and
my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the
offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by
justice,

And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize
itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so
above;
There is no shuffling, there the action
lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves
compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our
faults,
To give in evidence. What then? what
rests?
Try what repentance can.

In this monologue, the King recognizes that justice on this earth can be perverted and a favor here or some money there can change the verdict. Not so with the Lord. The only hope one has is repentance. We believe that repentance is agreeing with God that sin is sin and turning away from that sin to go toward God. "You are righteous, O Lord, and your judgments are right." The best way we

can live is to accept God's righteousness as true, forever righteousness and to accept his judgments as we see them in God's Word.

Saturday, February 12 - Luke 6:17-26

On one hand, I want you to compare these Beatitudes with the Beatitudes found in Matthew, but, on the other hand, I want you to read these Beatitudes and Woes on their own. Matthew and Luke have different audiences and so they choose to record different parts of Jesus' sermons. We can discuss more of that tomorrow night.

Today, recognize the radical reversal of the Kingdom of God. Recognize this as good news for the poor, hungry, and grieving. What about if you are rich, full, and happy now? Is Jesus really saying that you have received your blessings today, so you have none to look forward to? I have a hard time believing that. At the same time, materialism is rampant and food is thrown away in one part of the world while people do not have clothing nor food in other parts of the world. Woe to those whose lifestyle makes others suffer! Let this passage soak into your soul today. Let's consider these blessings *and* woes tomorrow night.

Sunday, February 13 - Psalm 124

WEEK 6: LIVING OUT THE TRUTH

Monday, February 14 - Psalm 119:145-152

Have you ever bargained with God? You found yourself or a loved one in a difficult position and you prayed "O God, just help me and I will do _____ for you." One of my favorite Christian authors, Richard Foster, speaks about prayer often. While he doesn't advocate the tit-for-tat type of prayer above, he does make the observation that biblical prayer is frequently "do this Lord, so that..." more than "not my will but yours be done." Hannah asks for a son, Abraham

barter to save Sodom, and we pray for the sick to be well, hungry to be fed, and oppressed to be free.

Our psalmist prays in verse 146 to be saved so that he can follow the Laws of the Lord. We can imagine what he means. Some type of oppression is preventing him from keeping the Sabbath; some legal authority is stopping him from keeping certain dietary laws. Exile from Jerusalem is preventing him from going to the Temple.

What about us? Many Christians around the world face similar problems today. In China, the church must meet in secret, being on guard that at any time can be disrupted by the authorities. In most countries of the Middle East, it is illegal to “go and tell” as Jesus commanded. In many countries, it is illegal to possess the Bible.

In these positions, it is perfectly appropriate to pray like the psalmist. “Save me, Lord, so I can fulfill your statutes!” While we do not find ourselves in these predicaments, we need to pray for the persecuted church around the world. “Save them, Lord, so they can keep your statutes!” Would you pray that prayer today? Pray for Christians around the world who do not have the freedom we do to proclaim and live out the Christian life.

Tuesday, February 15 - Psalm 119:153-160

“The sum of your word is truth;”

I typically tell people that the main theme of the Bible is Love. It is a story of God’s love for creation and humanity. God’s love permeates all of the Bible from creation in Genesis to the new creation in Revelation to everywhere in between. “God is love” and “For God so loved the world...” he gave us Jesus. God loves you. That’s the message of the Bible.

The psalmist says something different in verse 160. His summarization suggests that the theme of Scripture is truth. He is also correct. All of the Bible is

the truth about God's love for people. When Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." in John 14:6, he is saying that God is truth. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 that "all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...." "All Scripture is inspired by God..." "The sum of your word is truth."

There is no falsehood in Scripture. It is the inspired word of God which tells us the story of God's love for the world He created and the people He created. Will you take some time today thanking God for Scripture? Thank God for revealing himself in the pages of Scripture. Thank God for the comforting passages as well as the convicting ones. The sum of His word is Truth! Thanks be to God!

Wednesday, February 16 - Malachi 3:13-4:6

We conclude Malachi this morning by looking at the last of six arguments in the book. While reading Malachi over the past few weeks, we have been building up to this section. The Day of the Lord is coming, so repent has been the message of the last two weeks. The Day of the Lord comes in our passage today. Those who have prepared for the Day of the Lord will be spared; those who have ignored the call of God will be destroyed.

When you boil it down, the people of this world are separated into two groups: those who know God and those who don't. Nothing else will matter on Judgment Day. Let us not lose sight that in the end, this is the only allegiance which will matter. Who do you know that is not prepared for this day? Who is a goat when they need to be a sheep as Jesus says in Matt. 25? Let's take time to pray for those who are not ready for the Day of the Lord. Take time to pray in your personal prayer time. Similarly, we will take time to pray for the salvation of our friends, family, and neighbors during Prayer Meeting this morning as well.

Thursday, February 17 - Psalm 119:161-168

Persecution and Peace. Not exactly synonyms nor anything which the world would consider similar. But the psalmist, in this second-to-last stanza of the Psalm, claims that princes are persecuting him, yet he is at peace. Why is he at peace? Of course, it's because he loves the law. The Law seems to give him comfort.

In a well-known story but worth telling again, Horatio Spafford wrote the words to "It is well with my soul" in a moment of great grief. After planning a vacation to Europe, Mr. Spafford had to stay in Chicago on business. He encouraged the rest of his family to go on and he would join later. Only his wife would make it to Europe. The ship the Spafford family was on crashed into another ship and all of the Spafford children died at sea. When Horatio Spafford was onboard a ship across the Atlantic to meet his grieving wife, he crossed the spot where his children had died. In that moment of grief he wrote "It is well with my soul."

Whether the world gives us peace or sorrow, it is well with my soul because we have God on our side. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Even if we are faced with persecution without cause, we have peace in the present and hope for the future. Our life is not governed by what happens on this earth, but it is governed by what God has done for us. The Lord loves us. We love the Lord. The Lord gives us peace even in the midst of persecution.

Friday, February 18 - Psalm 119:169-176

In this closing stanza of Psalm 119, we find something which is a little shocking. Throughout the psalm, the psalmist has been regularly proclaiming his love for the Law. He has been crying out for safety and provision so that he can continue to follow the Law. We would think that he is one of the most faithful followers of God.

Yet, in the last verse of the psalm, he says he has gone astray and needs God to come and find him. He is lost and needs rescuing. Verse 176 is very reminiscent of the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15. We need the Good Shepherd to come and seek and save the lost sheep. We cannot find our way to the Shepherd on our own. Seek me out Lord! Find me and deliver me!

When this verse is put into context with the rest of the psalm, it also reminds me of what Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:15: "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the foremost." It's hard to fathom that Paul is really the worst sinner. But it is believable that he is so distraught over his sin, that he feels this way. It's hard to think that this psalmist is a lost sheep and needs saving. But it is believable that he is so concerned about his transgressions, that he feels this way.

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." All of us should feel guilt for unconfessed sin. It may make us feel as if we have strayed from our Lord and Shepherd. In those moments, return again to God's Word. Continue to have a love for the Law which will guide you as you confess sin to God. Do not forget the commandments of God so that you can be convicted of sin and confess. And when you confess, you can be confident that the Lord hears and forgives.

"The Lord, the Lord,
A God merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger,
And abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
Keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."

Saturday, February 19 - Genesis 45:1-15

This climax of the Joseph story is a great example of what Romans 8:28 tells us: “we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” Not only is it important that we can trust in this promise, but it is important that we believe this promise. Joseph knows that God has led them through slavery and prison for an ultimate purpose which is for the good of all of humanity. “God sent me...” he says in verse 7.

Is life the way you planned or has it gone unexpectedly? Instead of lamenting your circumstances, recognize that God is going to use this moment for good and there is an ultimate destination where God is leading you. God is preparing you for something great. “God sent you...” to this place and this time. Be patient with God’s plan and He will show you how all the pieces of your life fit together for his glory in his timing.

Sunday, February 20 - Psalm 125