

You are not great. You are not enough. People will fail to see God if you're in the way. So let them see more of Jesus and less of you.

Did anyone else grow up not being allowed to or not allowing their kids to read Harry Potter? I wasn't allowed to either. Not because my parents didn't allow me or for any witchcraft, it was simply because when my eyes saw the sheer size of those books, my brain did not ALLOW me to ever think twice about touching them. Reading is not my favorite hobby if you can't tell from that statement. It's ironic that I stand before you today teaching on Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible. But I doubt I'm the only one here today with this problem.

It's believed that around 1440 AD the first printing press was born, allowing for the mass production of books and writing. In fact it was one book in particular that became widespread, and that book was the Holy Bible. Before this invention it was very difficult to ever get your hands on the Word of God itself. The Word was mostly preached and taught through a Catholic priest who would have access. Much of the Protestant movement we now are enjoying today in church was carried on by common men who after this invention had full access to scripture and began asking some important

questions. One of those men was a German man named Martin Luther (not to be confused with the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) In October, 1517 Martin Luther would nail what we know as the 95 Theses to the Castle Church in Wittenberg in hopes of sparking a debate and calling for religious reform within the Catholic church. His protest would cost him much persecution including being excommunicated from the church in 1521. But one of Luther's biggest contributions to the Protestant movement away from the Catholic Church was the "Priesthood of All Believers." Luther believed that the Word of God is the Ultimate Truth, and it was the responsibility of all believers (not just ministers) to be mediators between God and humans. In other words, it's the responsibility of all Christians to bring others into relationship with Jesus and teach them the Word of God, not just priests.

We have come a long way since those days of the printing press and Martin Luther. So much so, that most of us here today can access the Bible on demand right out of our pockets with our phones. And yet, what has become so common, has also become discarded. It's estimated that 9 out of 10 households in America have at least one Bible, with most of them containing 3 or more. And out of those households around half have read

little to no scripture for themselves. I can't tell you the amount of Christians I've met who have never read the Bible cover to cover. And I get it, the Bible is a big book. It's intimidating. But when we think in terms of the fact that as Christians we base our entire lives and morality on this book, it's really not that big. I mean do we know what we're saying as Christians when we say we believe in the Bible. We believe that all the answers to life's most important questions are found in this book. We believe our identity and story is found in this book. We believe that this book isn't just a book, but the Living Word of the Almighty God. We believe the Creator of the Universe (who spoke the world into existence by the way), the Supreme Being, gave us His inspired Word. And when we look at it in those terms, the Bible doesn't only seem a little less big, it becomes a lot less common. Which is what today's Psalm is all about. Psalm 119 is a Hebrew Poem called an acrostic. An acrostic is a poem in which the writer begins every stanza with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order. If you look in your Bible you might see some words you don't recognize splitting up the different stanzas. That would be the Hebrew alphabet. (Show picture)

Every stanza contains 8 verses all starting with that letter in Hebrew. It's an incredible artistic expression by the writer emphasizing the necessity and beauty of God's Word.

If you don't know me My name is Grant Gardner, I'm the Middle School Minister here at Sherwood Oaks. And if you're wondering why I'm speaking today, it is not because you are 12 again, it is because our senior minister Shawn Green is currently on Sabbatical and so he has asked me to give the message today. So I'm honored to be with you all this morning, and I would like to start us off with some prayer over the message today as we digest this poem and for Shawn and his family on Sabbatical.

(Prayer)

As we discuss Psalm 119 I bring up that Church history at the beginning to get us thinking about the mission we're on.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

In fact our mission here at Sherwood Oaks is based off of this Great Commission: People helping people grow generations of Christ-led influencers. It's truly a great mission, but I believe we often cling to the first part of it. Going out to the world, making disciples, baptizing people. All of that sounds wonderful and impactful! But what does the next part say? "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." So my question is this: church, how can we teach the nations to observe something we don't know or observe ourselves?

Psalm 119 doesn't just highlight the necessity and beauty of God's Word, it highlights several different aspects of it again and again and again.

law
torah
instruction

testimonies
'edot
what God solemnly testifies to be his will

precepts
piqqudim
what God has appointed to be done

statutes
khuqqim; khuqqot
what the divine Lawgiver has laid down

commandments
mitsvot
what God has commanded

rules

mishpatim

what the divine Judge has ruled to be right

word

'imrah; dabar

what God has spoken

If you've been around Sherwood Oaks for any period of time you would know the name Alan Phillips. Alan was a former minister on staff with us for many years, and he retired last June of 2023. But one thing I always remember about Alan was his passion for reading scripture. Every Tuesday for our staff devotions Alan would lead all of the staff in a reading of scripture. It was one of my favorite things to be able to sit back and have God's Word read aloud to me. But before Alan would read to us he would guide us in being able to be ready to receive the Word. So although I'm not as gifted of a scripture reader as Alan, I'm going to attempt to do the same. I'm going to read the first three stanzas found in Psalm 119, and I want everyone to be paying attention to the key aspects we just talked about. So before we do, let's: Stretch our necks, take a deep breath in, hold, and release, both feet on the floor. Are you ready to receive the Word of God church?

“Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart— they do no wrong but follow his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands. I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me. How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Be good to your servant while I live, that I may obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. You rebuke the arrogant, who are accursed, those who stray from your commands. Remove from me their scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will

meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”

Psalms 119:1-24 NIV

Depending on your translation, you will find the Psalmist emphasizes his love for these aspects of scripture over and over throughout the poem. He takes us the readers and listeners through the ABC's of Hebrew to emphasize the delight we can find in knowing these aspects. Now maybe you are of the rule following type, but to me these aspects aren't things I particularly love. Rules, commandments, laws. I don't love rules. I don't love being told what to do. I don't love having to go 55 on a three lane highway Indiana. These things for many of us aren't the most fun or appealing aspects. But as we meditate on them I think it's important we distinguish two things.

1. This is part of our nature

- a. From the very beginning in Genesis chapter 3 we read the serpent tempts Eve to eat the fruit forbidden by God to be eaten by saying to her “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good

and evil.” -Genesis 3:5 ESV. The first sin and all other sins are rooted in rebellion. Adam and Eve lived with God in paradise and perfect harmony with creation, and yet they gave all of that up because they wanted to be in control. They didn’t want to have to submit to an authority that wasn’t themselves. And from that point on a disease was born inside of all us called sin in which we reject God and His perfect design and desire to do things our way. In Genesis 1 we see God speak the world or chaos into order and perfection. Our sin is an attempt to unravel this order and bring it back into chaos. Our sin is ultimately an attempt to steal the throne of God, and it causes nothing but evil and destruction as we tear down God’s perfect design. It’s easy to look around at the world and news and see this is a broken place we live in. But the mistake is to believe that we are not a part of that brokenness. That we don’t also contribute to the brokenness. We are rebellious people.

2. God’s Law is different from man’s law

- a. I’ve been seeing this all around in recent years and it drives me crazy every time. People saying “Jesus wasn’t religious.” It simply is not true. Jesus was not a fan of man made laws that

they added on to God's Law. But Jesus never broke a single one of God's Laws. He was the most religious, rule-following man that has ever existed. Completely perfect in the Law of God.

- b. ““Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” -Matthew 5:17-20 ESV

- c. For context, when the Law of God was given to the Israelite people, they had a tough time following it. Why? Because of point one, it's in our nature to be rebellious and desire to be our own authority. So the people continue to disobey God for years and years, and God decides He's had enough. He decides that

He will no longer give His protection to the Israelite people if they continue to disobey Him and be a bad example to all of the nations. So Israel is conquered by other nations and cast into exile out of God's protection. So some smart guys come along and say "hey, maybe we should've followed God's Law." And they commit themselves and everything they have to knowing God's Law and teaching it to the people so that the people will turn from their disobedience and be in His protection again.

These people are known in the Bible as the Pharisees, or religious leaders. And oftentimes we can give them a bad name because Jesus treats the Pharisees harsher and more critically than any other people group he interacts with. But it was for good reason. The Pharisees committed themselves to knowing God's Word and teaching it to the people, but in that process they forgot to remember point one. They began to believe that they weren't the ones that were contributing to the brokenness. That if more people would be just like them, God would fix this mess they're in and the world would be a better place. Does that sound familiar? You ever think if more people thought like you and lived like you did the world would be a better place? I

know I have. So Jesus, like a good coach who is hardest on his best player, treats them harshly in an effort to understand their own pride. I've heard some pastors go as far as to say Jesus ministers and interacts with the Pharisees more than any other people group outside of His disciples. The Pharisees were so close, and yet they missed the essential part: Their need for a Savior. They wanted to be able to save themselves, and so they took pride in doing everything they could to follow God's Laws to the point that they made up new man made laws in an effort to keep themselves and others from even being close to sinning. And so when God said to honor the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy, they forced the people to not do anything, including helping those in need. Their intention might've been good, but Jesus pushed back strongly against these man made laws. And this still happens today. There may be people in this room right now that can attest to that. They've been burned by churches or leaders who have put unnecessary burdens on them. And to those I say, I'm sorry. God's Law is different from man-made law.

- d. Psalm 119:17-24 says “Be good to your servant while I live, that I may obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. You rebuke the arrogant, who are accursed, those who stray from your commands. Remove from me their scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”
- e. Psalm 119 suggests that God’s Law is so wonderful that we should long for it at all times. God’s Law is delightful.
- f. If you read Exodus chapter 18 you will find that our modern court system in the US follows a very similar structure and is based on this interaction.
- g. In Exodus 23:4-5 we read the command “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.”

- h. Deuteronomy 23 God commands His people not to poop inside the camp, but to go outside the camp, dig a hole with a shovel and bury it after you're done. Funny, I know, but this was before we knew about sanitation.
- i. "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin." -Deuteronomy 24:14-15 NIV
- j. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." -James 1:27 NIV
- k. Religion from God is JUST and GOOD.

And yet, as we talked about earlier, because of our rebellious nature, none of us are able to keep it. So why give us the law in the first place? What's the point of knowing the Law and teaching people about it? How can it be so good if we can't uphold it? Paul tells us in Romans 5:

“The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:20-21 NIV

The Law of God isn't just wisdom and a beautiful way to live. Paul tells us here it plays an essential role in the story of the Gospel. The Law highlights our sinfulness and demonstrates our rebellion to God. It brings us back to Genesis 3 in the garden when our ancestors attempted to steal the throne of God. The Law shows us that we are sinful and in need of a Savior.

Which is why Psalm 119 is so beautiful because we see this picture of the psalmist demonstrating the opposite. If you look through the passage you will see the psalmist identify themselves 14 times as a servant. 7 is a Holy number in scripture, and it symbolizes completeness as creation was created in 7 days. So we see the psalmist call themselves completely a servant twice for emphasis. And then we see him talk about the beauty of submitting to God's rule. This poem strikes a stark contrast to our nature,

but it's a beautiful reminder of what it can look like when the Holy Spirit empowers us to overcome our worldly nature.

One of the most beautiful commands that God gives His people is the command to celebrate. One of those celebrations is listed out in Exodus 12 and it's called the Passover. If you've never heard of the Passover, the Israelites spent 400 years in slavery and bondage to Egypt. Egypt ruled over them with an iron fist, committing horrible acts on the Israelites. So God brought judgment down on Egypt in the form of plagues. And in the final plague God is going to kill every first born child in the land of Egypt. But He tells Moses, His messenger, to let the Israelite people know that any person who kills a lamb without blemish and wipes its blood on their door frame will be saved from this plague. And so that night, all of those that obeyed the Lord and put the blood of the lamb on their door frame were saved from this destruction. God did not check if the people inside the house were worthy of being saved, if they had the blood of the lamb on their door frame they were saved. And thousands of years later the same applies for us. Jesus is known in Revelation as the Lamb of God. Offered up as a sacrifice for those of us who put our faith in Him. The Law identifies our weakness and need for a Savior. But those of us who are done trying to

be our own ruler, who are done trying to save ourselves, can throw up our hands and say I'm done. I'm not enough, but I plead the blood of Jesus. Jesus upheld the Law to perfection becoming the ultimate sacrifice and doing what we could not do. We do not have a god who sits idle in Heaven. We have a God who gave up His great place in Heaven and came down to earth to suffer and die on a cross meant for us, so that we might be saved. That is the God of Christianity, different from all other religions. And the beauty of the Passover is those who pleaded the blood were saved, but if they remained in Egypt they would've continued to be slaves. Those who were saved were led out of Egypt and into the presence of the Most High God. Walking and submitting to where He led them. When we are saved by the blood it means submitting our lives to Christ. It means walking in step with His Word.

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

Psalms 119:105 NIV

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

1 John 1:7 NIV

So our decision comes to this: Will we choose to walk in step with our ancestors Adam and Eve and choose rebellion and to rule over ourselves? Will you continue to choose to live for the things of this world just doing whatever you feel like and chasing whatever makes you happy from moment to moment? Or will you choose to believe there's something more to this life? That we might have a purpose greater than our own fleeting desires?

Will you choose the position of the servant in Psalm 119 and choose to submit to God as our Ruler? To serve a purpose and Kingdom greater than your own and anything you could ever imagine. If so, don't keep that decision a secret. Let someone here today know that you are not the same. That you no longer choose rebellion, but that you choose to walk under the guidance and love of the Creator of the Universe who welcomes you into His Kingdom with love and grace.

“For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.”

Luke 8:17 NIV

There will come a day in which I am brought before my accuser and all my sins will be laid bare before God and I will sit in judgment before Him. And I don't know what that will look like exactly, but what I do know is when that day comes it won't look good for me. I am a horrible sinner unworthy to be in the presence of God. I am not enough. But I believe in the one who is enough. In that moment I will plead the blood of Jesus and my slate will be wiped clean. I will be welcomed in as a child of God, completely unworthy of the gift, but justified nonetheless. What about you? Will you plead the blood of Jesus?