

Part 3: Why We Read?

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If you've been with us the past few weeks, we've been in a short series here at Sovereign Hope working through what the Christian life looks like specifically in the context of the gathered assembly, the local church.

This week we are going to look specifically at how the Bible, God's word should shape our personal and our gathered lives. I was up in Johnny's office the other day and he had a tuning fork. I'm not sure if you've ever had the ability to play with one of those but it's a pretty fun tool musicians use to help everyone get in tune. You strike the fork against an object and it begins to vibrate at such a high frequency that it produces the sound of one single and specific note.

But what amazed me all the more is that he taught me that you can take that tuning fork, vibrating at that specific frequency, and you can touch the bottom part of it to an object and that object then begins to amplify and resonate the same note as the physical force of the frequency works through the material of the object.

In other words, you strike the fork on the desk and it begins to vibrate, but you touch that vibrating fork to the bookshelf, and the whole bookshelf amplifies the sound of the fork.

What a wonderful illustration of God's word both in its nature and in the role it plays in the believer's life.

For many of us our view of God's word is shaped by two insufficient, but real, sources. The first would be our own internal experience. We tried to read and understand God's word, but our lack of sensational experience or immediate intellectual clarity caused us to come to some sort of conclusion. The second source would be that of external criticism. We heard our high school history teacher or our TikTok philosopher say something about the ordinary nature or the seeming contradictions inside of scripture and we therefore come to a conclusion from that information about God's word.

And while critical thinking and personal experience have great value both in the defense of God's word and our relationship to it, if we want to honestly and sincerely understand God's word we must humble ourselves to at least consider the nature and power of scripture from the mouth of the God who gives it to us.

What we will see today is that though the Bible is simply a book, it is not God, it is not the fourth distant cousin of the Trinity, it is the primary means through which God has chosen to reveal himself. The Triune Godhead has so chosen to smack the pages of scripture through divine inspiration that these human words resonate to life as and with the word of God.

And precisely because this word is so inspired by God himself it is the means through which God organizes our life in line with the work of the Holy Spirit. To be touched and submitted to God's word is to inevitably have your life transformed into an instrument of Jesus' continued grace. Sounding more like him to a dying world, and living more like him for our own personal joy.

This is why we begin our service with a call to worship. Before anything happens, we read God's word. Why? So that we might become alight with the tone of God's word--that it might take our weary, restless hearts and call it to the tune of worship.

Every Sunday we begin with God's word because Peter tells us in 1 Peter that anyone who is a Christian is such because they have been born again by the living word of God. To be a believer is to be a creature of the word.

So what does it look like to believe what God says about his own word, and how does it shape our week and our time together on Sunday? Well, in looking at Psalm 119:129-136 we are going to answer the question of "Why We Read?" with three answers: **We Read Because God's word is wonderful** (verses 129-131), but secondly we read because **God's word is Effective** (we will see two effects God word has on us in verses 132-135), and finally we read because **God's word is needed** (verse 136).

With that said let's examine the first few verses of our passage today: **Psalm 119:129-131**.

Our memory verse this week, also out of Psalm 119:18, was a wonderful accident as it prepared us for this passage by equipping us with this beautiful prayer: "Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."

This leads us to our first point this morning, we read because **God's word is wonderful**. We need to work this idea into our heads today because we live in a world where what is wonderful is generally relative.

Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder. This works for cars, and art, and food. But it doesn't work with God's word. Let me give you an example. If someone showed you a piece of art that they loved, and if they showed it to you and you didn't love it, we would naturally assume that the problem is in the art. It didn't meet your standards, it didn't please your ascetic.

But if we look at Psalm 119:18 and Psalm 119:129 together what we see is the conclusion that if we examine God's word and do not find it wonderful the problem is not with God's word, but with our eyes!

Psalm 119:18 isn't asking you to pray that God's word becomes wonderful, it's praying that our eyes would see the wonder that is already there. That's reiterated here in verse 129 where David says, "Your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them."

God's word does not become wonderful as we keep them. God's word might become more comforting, more trustworthy, more beautiful experientially as we enjoy it more and more. But God's word doesn't become wonderful because we believe it. It is wonderful. His story, his testimony, his self-revelation of himself in our world is objectively wonderful. And a right response to seeing God's word as such is to keep it. To obey it, believe it and want it.

Why is God's word wonderful? Because of what it is and what it does.

What is it? Not to belabor the point, but it is God's word. If you visit any museum you will find historically preserved writings of men like George Washington, or the letters of Ann Frank, and these are valuable because of whose words they relay.

The Bible, both the Old and New Testament, 66 books written by 35 individuals, over the span of thousands of years, in three different languages, is God's word. Just the same as Lewis and Clark's letters were the very words of Lewis and Clark this book is the word of God.

But how is that given all the data we just gave? It is because God in the Holy Spirit has over time so chosen to inspire human authors to write in their own unique voices exactly what God wanted them to write. Consider Peter's explanation of this in **2 Peter 1:19-20**.

God wrote through men as they were indwelt by the third person of the Trinity himself. It is exactly God's word.

Here's the comfort of this doctrine. The Bible is not a portal. I saw advertised over the course of the pandemic Facebook's video chat device called, "The Portal." It's a screen and a camera which allows you to summon on the other end Grandma Betsy and to show her your new sweater. How many of us think of God's word like this.

That sometimes, we can go to the Bible and we turn it on, boot it up and call up Grandma, but sometimes she doesn't answer. Sometimes, even though the portal is open, the communication is sporadic.

But the Bible is not a portal. It is not a vessel in which God speaks when he wants to and is silent when he is busy. The Bible is God's handwritten letter to us, it cannot stop being God's word. It is always on, always speaking, always revealing the God who stands behind it.

There is a website called Cameo which brings in over 52 Million dollars a year as people pay to have celebrities call their friends and leave personalized birthday messages. But here, for free, awaiting you every time you open it, is the very word of the Triune God of all creation.

And because it is God's word it is illuminating to us. Peter just told us to pay attention to it like a light shining in the darkness, and look back again at what David says in **Psalms 119:130**.

God's word is wonderful because of what it is, God's word. But it's wonderful because of what it does, it gives draws us to it and gives us light as it unfolds before us.

If this word is God's word, then it would do us well to pay attention to it. Why? Because this world is dark. Our messy life is complicated. But God's word gives us light and gently comes to even the most simple among us and helps us see things a bit more clearly.

It is from these pages of scripture that we find what Peter says in 2 Peter 1:3, all things pertaining to life and godliness. All doctrine of the Christian church is found in these pages, but the Bible is more than doctrine. It is a story of how it started, what went wrong, and what the loving and eager plan of God's salvation is.

When we read and understand that story we are encouraged because we find ourselves and our own problems in the characters of scripture and we find God's promise always big enough for us.

Many of us find Bible reading intimidating because we don't pick up on this divine history which makes sense of our own story. But let me just give you a brief fly over of this story.

The story of scripture begins in the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Bible. In those books we see how God pursued his broken, sinful creation and set a plan to regather them as his people through his promise. Then in the history books (those are books like the Chronicles, the Kings, 1 and 2 Samuel) we read of how difficult it was for God's people to keep up their end of the promise and how even the best kings failed to take care of his people. Then in the prophets we read of primarily two things. First, we see that God will indeed judge his faithless people but that second, God will keep his promise to those who repent, he will establish a perfect world where he will dwell with his people and care for them as their perfect King.

Then in the New Testament gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) we see how Jesus is that long awaited answer to God's promise. He was the perfect prophet, priest and King who obeyed God without flaw he was the perfect person that we were meant to be and he died the sacrificial death so that all the promises kept in Jesus Christ could be applied by grace to those who believe in him. Then in the remainder of the New Testament we read of how this new people of God formed by the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ is to live and act and love until God brings us home forever in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

This word, this story is a wonderful story of what an amazing God did to save a wretched person like me and you. It's not a story of what you must do to be saved, but a story of what Jesus did to save sinners and restore us to God.

People often ask me how I ended up in ministry. By the time I graduated college I was an Emmy winning sports journalist. But I was also on staff part-time at the church. I was in two professions in which I got to declare news, but what won me over to ministry was that this word, these testimonies, this news is wonderful news. Beautiful news. Life changing news.

It's news that should create in us a holy desire. Look again at **Psalm 119:131**.

Because this is God's word, because it is wonderful, because it is the only story that makes sense of our own world we pant for it. We should want more of it in our life.

This is why we want our services on Sunday morning to be saturated with God's word. My house is just a couple blocks away from Bridge Pizza and there are some days where the wind fills my house with the most delicious smelling pizzas and all I want is more.

That's what we want our church service to be in regards to God's word. For those who come here, we want you to smell the goodness of what is available to you daily in the Bible. This is why we have a scripture reading in the middle of our worship, and why at the end of it we remind each other of two things: 1. This is the word of the Lord, and 2. That we should be immensely grateful that we have it.

It's why the longest portion of our time together, the sermon, is an expositional sermon looking to expound on a specific passage of scripture. It's why, if you'll notice, our worship songs have scripture

between the verses. We want you to see that if there was something profound about what you just sang, that the source of that profound experience is God's word.

It's why we conclude our service with a benediction from God's word meant to send you out into the world filled with all the empowerment of God's blessing.

It's why we want you doing your daily Bible reading with us, it's why we are memorizing scripture together, it's why our women's ministry is doing a study on the Old Testament, and why GCF preaches on campus every week.

We want God's word why? Because it is God's word and it is wonderful.

But God's word is not only objectively wonderful, it is also effective. Effective to do real things in your life.

This is what David wants to show us in our next point: We read because **God's word is effective**.

Effective for what? We will see two ends: Effective to bring us freedom from slavery and effective to show us God's favor towards us. Let's see if you can discern these two ends in **Psalm 119:132-135**.

In college I had a professor who told a story of him visiting some indigenous tribe in the rainforest. At dinner he reached out and took a piece of bread for his plate and all the warriors of the tribe stood up and prepared to attack him.

His guides calmed down the situation but what had happened was that he reached his left hand into the bowl, and culturally it was the person's left hand with which they cleaned themselves up after using the restroom. So this seemingly natural act was actually an act of immense disrespect and offense.

What we see in Psalm 119:133-134 is that it is God's word which sets us free from the bondage of sin that we live in, even if we, like that man was, are unaware of it.

All of us are born into a problem of sin, and in part it's the kindness of God's word which alerts us to this dilemma and sets us free from it. This is the first way God's word is effective: ***Effective to bring us freedom from sin***. God's word shows us the hidden slavery of sin in our life and calls us not only out of sin, but into the wonderful joy of liberated Christlike obedience.

There's this wild story in 2 Chronicles 34 where King Josiah is repairing the temple of the Lord and as the construction workers are preparing for the remodel some of them find the book of Moses, which was either the book of Deuteronomy, or the whole of the Pentateuch.

No one really knew what it was so it got passed from person to person until it got to the king and King Josiah read it and look at what happened afterwards: **2 Chronicles 34:19-21**.

Josiah, who thought he was pleasing God alright, read the word of God's law and realized that the whole of the kingdom was living in open disobedience towards God and that the result of this was God's wrath.

As we read God's word we will encounter clarity regarding our own sin. The author of Hebrews says it this way: **Hebrews 4:12**.

But as much as God's word convicts us just like that professor experienced, and just like Josiah believed, it also shows us the way forward. Josiah called for the priest why? Because part of God's law showed how the priests were to help God's people atone for their sin. It revealed the problem, but it also provided the solution.

Look at the goal of God's word again in **Psalm 119:133-134**.

God's word calls us to obedience. It shows us how to live, it calls us out of slavery to sin, and out of fear of man, into direct obedience to God.

For \$15 a month you can purchase a subscription to a program called "MasterClass" where experts in their field teach you specific skills. You can learn drumming from Ringo Starr and cooking from Gordon Ramsey. People pay for this program because they realize they want to know how to live. But in the pages of scripture is not only what we need to be saved, but the wonderful privilege of being taught by God himself the joy of how to live. How to walk in righteousness, love like Jesus, and how to parent like God parents us.

This is part of God's plan for enduring his church. Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy who was in way over his head. But look at the encouragement he gave in **1 Timothy 4:12a**.

Paul told the church to be committed even to the simple reading of scripture. Why? Because when we don't know what to do, and even when the pastor feels overwhelmed, scripture gives us a way forward. It shapes our lives in a distinctly positive way.

Once more Paul speaks to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:14-17**.

God's word produces change. But more powerful than the change we experience in scripture is the person we experience in scripture. This is the second effect of God's word: scripture is ***Effective to Show us God's Favor***.

Look at the bookend verses of this section: **Psalm 119:132,135**.

You see this is so important for us to see because the bread which holds all the moral obligations of obedience together, however beautiful and freeing those might be, is the relational favor God gives to his people through his word.

If you noticed there are seven words David uses in these eight verses to describe God's word: testimonies, word, commandments, promise, precepts, statutes and law.

God's word is incredibly varied. Sometimes it commands, sometimes it communicates, sometimes it instructs, sometimes it describes, sometimes it breaks down, and sometimes it builds up. But in the midst of different kinds of scripture there is revealed one God in radiant beauty.

Scripture doesn't merely exist so that we might obey God, scripture exists so that by the promise of God we might know God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

God doesn't want you to have a relationship with his rules, he wants you to have a relationship with him. The Bible is not ultimately a book about you. It's a book about a radiant, glorious, magnificent God and how through the work of the gospel he has favor on broken sinners through Jesus Christ, and that favor isn't a rubber stamp of "forgiven" it is a new name which calls us "child."

That's the beauty of the gospel. It's only the gospel in which obedience and change come in the confines of God's grace. The world wants change and then grace, but God reveals himself in scripture as the God who gives grace and then in the confines of that grace calls us to change.

The central point in which God reveals who he is, his grace to us, and what we need to do to receive that grace is seen in the incarnate work of Jesus Christ. Look at what Jesus says to people who were trying to find God's favor in their own efforts: **John 5:39-40**.

Who is the center of scripture? Jesus Christ. He is the one who makes sense of the whole story. He is the one who shows us the nature of the Father in his perfect loving life, and the nature of sinners on his substitutionary cross.

Scripture can be wonderfully effective for parenting, and finances, and marriage, and conflict resolution, and political way-keeping and so much more. But to be Christian is to see the primary effectiveness of scripture in its ability to show us the way back to God through Jesus Christ. Look how John concludes his gospel: **John 20:30-31**.

And this leads us to our last point today. We read because **God's Word is Needed**.

Look at where David finishes this passage: **Psalms 119:136**.

If this word is this wonderful. If this word tells us how we should live and gives us the favor of God which can only come through faith in Jesus Christ, then shouldn't our hearts break for others who do not see his word as good?

Here we see that God's word gives us evangelistic empathy. As it reveals to us the goodness of God in Jesus Christ, we should want to invite more and more people to know God as God has communicated in his word.

Which means for those who struggle with where to start in evangelism, God's word is your nearest friend. One of the greatest steps you can take in evangelism is not to prepare a five point message on how the gospel interacts with the truth claims of the world, but to just invite your neighbor to read the Bible with you. I know one member here who just approached his Mormon neighbor and invited him to a Bible study and church would you pray that God produces fruit in that.

There's an old children's song which holds a rich doctrinal truth that goes like this: "Jesus love me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

How can we know God's love for us? By hearing what the Bible says to us and believing it. Our world's benediction of salvation changes daily. What qualified you yesterday might be woefully out of date by tomorrow morning and certainly by next year. But to hear what scripture says is to hear something which endures through eternity.

We need God's word for where else will we hear the saving words of life. This is why when we confess sin together corporately at the end of each sermon we read an assurance of pardon from scripture to remind us that those who believe in Jesus have had their needs met.

Have you considered that today?

Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, let us reason together says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be whiter than snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

Matthew 11:28-29, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 31:33-34, For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Romans 10:8-13, "But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Dear church let us read for it's in this word and this word alone that we have life.