SESSION 2

God Speaks Through the Bible



In Focus:
God's Word is His primary means of speaking to us.

LOOK AT OUR WORLD

The internet is full of sites claiming to provide guidance for us and show us how to do what we want to do. Pick a subject, and someone is ready to give you directions on the matter. This is nothing new. Solomon said, "There is no end to the making of many books" (Eccl. 12:12). There is no end to the human desire to share our opinions with others. While advice from others can be somewhat helpful, the ultimate guidance we need comes from God, and the primary way He has revealed His will for us is through His Word.

Psalm 19 is a brilliant celebration of the reality that God speaks through His Word. C. S. Lewis said of this psalm, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."[1] The Old and New Testaments are both filled with God's revelation of Himself and His ways. We thrive in His teachings; they are life-giving for us.



When has a passage of the Bible made a lasting difference in your life?

God speaks to reveal His character and nature.

Psalm 19:7-9

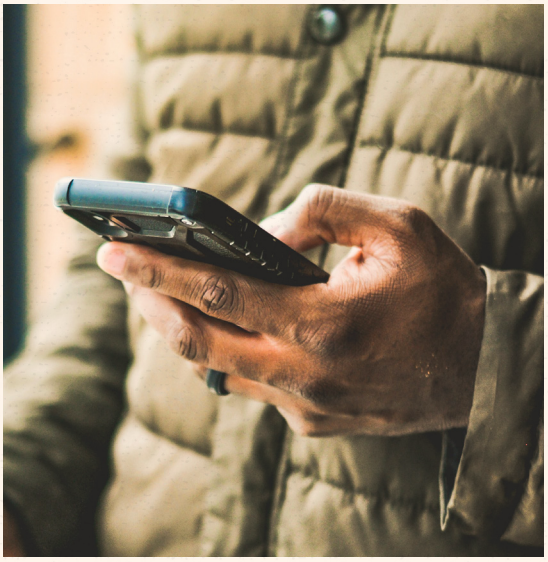
7 The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad; the command of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up.
9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are reliable and altogether righteous.

A particularly powerful experience for me took place on a small island off the mainland of British Columbia, Canada. I was seated with my family just above the shoreline in anticipation of a magnificent summer sunset. We watched in silence, serenaded by waves lapping the beach and filled with wonder by the enormity of the ocean that stretched out in front of us, the expanse of the clear but dimming evening sky, and the countless mountain peaks of other islands that jutted up from the water. Just as the sun started to dip below the horizon we were startled by a bagpiper behind us playing "Amazing Grace." He continued to play his pipes until the last rays of sun left the sky. Then all was hushed. I was unexpectedly and deeply moved. In that precious moment we had glimpsed something of the glory of God and been reminded of His holiness, love, and grace.

Psalm 19 begins with a grand pronouncement that all of nature declares the glory of God and that the expanse of the sky above us and the enormity of the universe beyond it are manifestations of God's work (vv. 1-6). Yet as splendid as the revelation of God is in nature, the revelation of God in His Word is clearer and even more splendid. Yes, nature "declares," "proclaims," and "pours out speech" with exceeding power concerning God's majesty and wisdom. But God's revelation of His character, nature, and ways through His Word is far greater. As we read the Bible, every one of His words is inspired to be of essential benefit to us.

Too often the Bible is mistaken to be a sort of rule book. It is not. It is in fact the record of God's revelation of Himself to His people. And it is the perfect instruction of God; it is "the testimony of the LORD" (v. 7). It is God's teachings! His revelation of His character and nature simultaneously becomes the basis for the life and action of His people.

God's revelation demonstrates the way of God, and a righteous person will take great delight in making whatever adjustments are necessary to join God in what He is doing, in the way that He is doing it (v. 7). As the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the Word of God, we are revived, made wise, and filled with joy as we experience Him working in, through, and around us (vv. 7-8).



We live during a time of constant, significant, fast-paced, and wide-ranging change. Technology that many of us use daily is hard pressed to keep up with new developments and demands. The cell phone or tablet that we bought only five years ago seems near obsolete today. Every news cycle introduces us to fresh international conflict, shifting borders, and power dynamics. Financial markets, debt management, global currencies, and so much more are in perpetual flux. I have been chided that the only certainties in life are death, taxes, and change. Is there really nothing changeless? Yes, there is! God's revelation is constant and unchanging.

God's Word endures forever. It is reliable in every generation, in every culture, and in every setting. It does not change with the times; it is not affected by fads and trends. It will not become obsolete or need upgrading. Despite our best intentions, human interactions can be marred by mistakes, insincerity, partial truths, limited data, and compromise. God's Word is not that way.

When God reveals His character and nature, it is because He is bringing His will to bear on those of us who hear it. Our understanding of God's Word is incomplete until it has been thoroughly applied to our lives. Every act of obedience is an intentional act of worship and a declaration of the kind of people we want to be. We must thoughtfully welcome the bearing of God's will on us and trust Him.

- ***What are some things you've learned about God from Scripture?***

- ***When has a verse from the Bible brought wisdom or opened your eyes about a matter?***

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God speaks to encourage/inspire us and warn us.

Psalm 19:10-11

[10] They are more desirable than gold—than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb. [11] In addition, your servant is warned by them, and in keeping them there is an abundant reward.

Located deep within Lookout Mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee, is Ruby Falls. After taking an elevator into the heart of the mountain and hiking through winding and narrow subterranean passageways, explorers emerge at the tallest underground waterfall open to the public in the United States. It is magnificent! And then someone turns the lights off for effect. I have never been buried in such utter darkness. It is paralyzing. It is intimidating. It is humbling. There is nothing you can do to remedy your situation until someone turns the lights back on. My expedition to the falls has become a parable of life. At best, our journey through this life is cloaked in darkness. We cannot know the future. Certainty, at least absolute certainty, is illusory. Though we want to have the security of light for our path, we lack the ability to "flip the switch." This is why the psalmist excitedly and reverently cried out, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path" (Ps. 119:105).

The Holy Spirit opens our eyes through God's Word. We journey with Him through the passageways and corridors of sacred text. When His Word is active in our lives, it changes us. We are enlivened by it. We are motivated by it. We make confident progress by its light. That is God's design. God speaks through the Bible for the purpose of revealing His character and nature, His will and His ways, to move us onto His agenda.



God's Word answers the cry of our deepest desires to know God and enjoy Him. We crave it; we hunger for it (v. 10). The worth and desirability of the Bible is like fine gold and sweet honey. For millennia, people have sacrificially strived to secure riches that will not erode and to obtain food that is delicious and sweet on the tongue and fulfilling in the stomach. Both fine gold and sweet honey are enjoyable but fleeting. As desirable as they might be, they pale in comparison to the unsurpassable richness and the incomparable sweetness of the Word of God. His Word is a storehouse of treasures that will never be exhausted. It is a storeroom of sustenance that will never run dry of spiritually nourishing food.

God's Word has a transforming effect on those who allow the Holy Spirit to make application of what He says. God's Word keeps the wise person safely in the center of God's will. When He speaks, He not only lights our path, but He also forewarns us of possible pitfalls (v. 11) and demonstrates the rewards of godliness.

It has become common for us to use the Global Positioning Service (GPS) to help us navigate to a desired destination. We rely (perhaps too readily) on its impersonal positioning, navigation, and timing services as if it is infallible. But then the signal is lost, or the roadways have not been updated, and we are stranded without a map. Even in this day of advanced technology, I take solace in getting directions from sojourners who are present with me and know the way. They know both the journey and the trouble-areas to avoid. I gladly follow their lead.

There is tenderness in the phrase "Your servant" (v. 11). A *servant* is a person who is committed to the will of someone else, either by appointment, office, or choice. A servant takes personal responsibility to execute the will of someone else. In truth, that is precisely what we are as Christ followers. We have pledged ourselves to serve under the lordship of Jesus Christ. His will is now our will. His plans are now our plans. His ways are now our ways. His agenda is now our agenda. And He has promised that He will care for us out of the very storehouse and storeroom of heaven. He will make good on His promise, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

- ***When have you seen Scripture keep someone from making a big mistake?***

- ***How have you been rewarded by keeping God's Word front and center?***

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ENGAGE

Meditations and Mutterings









1. What kinds of things might you mutter in the situations pictured above?

2. What could possibly happen with your words or actions if you continue to mutter/meditate on those thoughts and attitudes?

3. What is a verse from Psalm 19:7-14 that you could meditate on, even mutter, instead of those negative thoughts and attitudes?

4. What impact could that have on your words and actions?

God speaks to convict us and guide us in right living.

Psalm 19:12-14

12 Who perceives his unintentional sins? Cleanse me from my hidden faults.
13 Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion. 14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

From the vantage point of adulthood, we look back to our childhood with gratitude for the corrective intervention of nurturing adults when we indulged in behaviors that would have caused us harm. We would have to confess that sometimes those behaviors were willfully wrong. We were defiant and flaunted our desires in the face of whatever authorities confronted us. Sometimes those behaviors were innocent. We unintentionally, even naively engaged in improper behavior. Either way, it was the disruption of those behaviors by a caring adult that brought harmful actions or words to light, convicted us of their gravity, reinforced healthy habits, and clarified the benefits of right behavior patterns. The psalmist celebrated the reality that the Bible plays a similar but purer function in our lives. When God speaks through His Word, He will intentionally convict us of wrong living and guide us into right living for His glory and for our good (vv. 12-14).



In the same way that the sun dominates the daytime sky (vv. 4-6), the Word of God dominates human life. At one and the same time, the sun can be welcome for the light and warmth it gives and terrifying for the penetrating, unrelenting heat it brings. The same is true of the Word of God. God speaks through His Word to impart life; He also speaks with scorching intensity to test and purify our hearts, impacting our motives and actions.

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Just like the sun above is not dispensable, the Word of God is not dispensable. It is a scientific certainty that life on this planet would cease to exist without the sun; it is a spiritual certainty that no meaningful human life can thrive without the revealed Word of God in the Bible.

With all its perfections, God's Word penetrates and examines us. God is not content to leave "unintentional sins" and "hidden faults" (v. 12) unaddressed. He loves us too much to do that. If left unchecked, these faults inevitably lead to overt, presumptuous, and deliberate sins. And often our "hidden faults" are not hidden because they are too small to see or too inconsequential to matter. They are hidden because they are too characteristic of us to register—we just do not see them. They are so common in us, part of our "normal," that we do not examine them.

When I took the position of president of a seminary in Canada, there were some areas of the campus that were in disrepair due to deferred maintenance. Nowhere was this more obvious than in a large section of road that served as the solitary entryway to the parking lots for our academic buildings. Every time it rained, a deep pool of water the size of a small pond collected in the middle of the road. Without conscious thought, driver after driver simply drove onto the shoulder to get around. The behavior was instinctive. The gross blemish on our beautiful campus did not seem to register on seminary personnel. Every visitor saw it. But seminary personnel did not. Why? Because as shocking as it sounds, it had become their "normal." What should have been recognized as a glaring problem was routinely and unintentionally overlooked. It had become a "hidden fault." We all have "hidden faults" in our lives that we navigate around without knowing it. Through His Word, God will bring those to our awareness and remove them.

If we will not allow God to purge our hidden faults, then we become those who sin willfully (v. 13). This flagrant sin is committed in arrogance, and yet still shows no awareness of having done wrong. It is brazen rebellion against the lordship of Christ. These sins will fiercely rule over us. God speaks to us in His Word in a way that is accessible to us. The psalmist did not approach the Lord as his accuser or judge but as his refuge and champion. The psalmist was God's "servant" (vv. 11,13)—he belonged to God in a precious covenant relationship. And while the heavens praise God by their very existence (v. 1), the psalmist wanted to add his voice to that chorus of praise.

- ***How have you seen sin rule over a person?***

- ***How has God been your Rock and your Redeemer?***

LIVE IT OUT

Commit to reading God's Word as you seek His will in the matter you identified in Session 1. Look up specific verses that address or are connected to the matter. Choose one or more of the following applications:

VIEW OF GOD

Which Scripture verses has God used in your life to clearly demonstrate His will and His ways? Write these things down in a journal. What adjustments need to happen so you can join Him in His agenda?

VIEW OF SELF

What passage of Scripture has God used to get your attention about your heart and your lifestyle? Write these things down in a journal. How has that impacted the way you are now living?

VIEW OF OTHERS

Gather with a few fellow Christians. What common themes emerge from your study of God's Word? Is there a common application that can inform group action? If so, encourage one another in this journey.

1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, 1958), 56.



REMEMBER

"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." Psalm 19:14

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