

## CHAPTER

# 5

### *Fresh Ground or Instant: Experiencing the Word of God*

Psalm 119:137-144

A legend from the year 850 AD tells that a goat herder, Kaldi of Ethiopia, was tending his goats one day when he noticed that the goats that ate red berries from a little shrub were much friskier and more playful than those that did not. And so Kaldi did what any bored goat shepherd would do: he tried one himself. Minutes later he began to feel happier, and thus the first coffee bean was discovered!<sup>1</sup>

Today, coffee is the world's most celebrated beverage on earth—more than 400 billion cups are consumed every year. It is one of the world's most popular commodities, second only to oil.<sup>2</sup>

But in 1938 something happened. The Nestle company invented instant coffee to help the Brazilian government solve its coffee surplus problem.<sup>3</sup> But many coffee diehards refused to lower their caffeine standards to an instant coffee mix and continued to put their coffee through the old percolating procedure. Like David Letterman, they believed that “decaffeinated coffee is useless warm brown water.”<sup>4</sup>

Many of us have become like those instant coffee drinkers. We don't want to spend the hours of labor, meditation, and soaking up of God's Word required to make a mature Christian. We are “instant” Christians when it comes to Bible study. We want immediate results with little labor and lightning fast Bible facts with no meditation.

This is the greatest danger of our current information age. Never before have we had the availability of thousands of books, commentaries, dictionaries and encyclopedias at the simple click of a mouse. What took Bible students an hour to find in Luther's day, we can have in three seconds. It is now easier to

1 “Koffee Korner,” <http://www.koffeekorner.com/koffeehistory.htm>, May 18, 2005.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 “Koffee Korner,” <http://www.koffeekorner.com/quotes.htm>, May 18, 2005.

get more for less; but this can have tragic results. Many people who do not love God and who do not treasure His Word can acquire more Bible knowledge than those who lived 500 years ago. And they do so without enduring the tedious labor required to gain the same information.

There is a tremendous value in that invested time, for nothing can replace the extended meditation in God's Book. After writing a six volume commentary on the book of Hebrews, John Owen (a man who knew English, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic) concluded that the most valuable tools for learning the Scriptures were prayer and meditation. And you can't do either well without investing time.

The Word of God was never meant to feed your brain alone. It was also created to feed your soul. Until you have wrestled with, endured pain with, prayed with, and suffered with the text of God's holy Word, you cannot say that God's Word has percolated through your mind and heart.

When was the last time the Word of God filtered through you? I don't mean when was the last time you attended a Bible study, memorized a verse or listened to a good sermon. When was the last time the Word of God broke you to tears over your sin, or filled you with shouting joy over God's goodness to you? When last did your heart glow so hot with praise for God it almost burst? When were you last so full of God's Word that the pores of your skin emitted its fragrance?

I am speaking of those moments that the Word of God breaks through the calloused walls of your heart and floods you with a sense of God's presence that falls nothing short of supernatural elation or when you see a sinner breakdown with mixed joy and sorrow as he repents of his sins and puts his faith in Jesus Christ.

These are things that cannot be written on paper or sketched in diagrams. They are inexpressible in human language, for nothing compares with the supernatural experience of being flooded with and fed by the Holy Scriptures!

If you have not experienced the Word of God in this way, you may be wondering if you are a "fresh ground" or "instant" Christian. The answer lies in Psalm 119:137-144. The believer whose soul has been soaked by the Word of God will take three steps:

**1. He will embrace the holy character of God (vs 137).**

RIGHTEOUS ARE YOU, O LORD, AND  
UPRIGHT ARE YOUR JUDGMENTS (119:137).

The Hebrew language uses an extra word to make this passage extremely direct. "Righteous are **You** O Lord!" God's person is righteous and His judgments are

upright. Notice how the psalmist cannot separate the Word of God from the God of the Word. What the Word says of God is always true, and everything about God's person perfectly agrees with the Word.

At its root, "God is righteous" simply means that God is always right. The protestors protest and the atheists will debate, but in spite of all that man may say, God is always right. Bring every human into the court of judgment and you will find fault. Bring in the most godly pastors or the most sanctified martyrs and you will find fault. Bring in Christian devotionals or exegetical commentaries written by man and though they may be good in some areas, none are perfectly right. And often the more pious a religious man grows, the more arrogantly he thinks. But there is not a germ of imperfection found in God, for He is always right.

God is altogether righteous in every way, never sinning, never erring, never doing a single deed or thinking a single thought that contains even a grain of imperfection. This is a terrifying thought for the sinful creature. Who can stand with head held high in the burning presence of the Holy One? What sin-stained creature would be so bold as to lift his eyes in the presence of the sinless and mighty God of the universe?

Yet it is also a sea of comfort to the believer. When all the world around seems to scream that God is not fair or that life is unjust, remember that God rules this world and ordains all that happens in it. And since God is righteous, what He is doing is always right and is always for the believer's good. Because He is sovereign, He may even use the unjust lashes of the wicked to help you love Him more.

In 602, a man named Phocas rebelled against the Byzantine Emperor Maurice and took over the kingdom. As Maurice was led out to execution, each of his five sons was executed before his father's eyes. At each fatal blow Maurice said, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments."<sup>5</sup> Maurice's serene poise was unbelievable. How could a father exalt God at every blow that ended the life of his sons? Because he knew that in spite of man's error, God's person is righteous and His judgments are upright.

Paul the apostle understood this, too. That is why he could say, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil 2:14). The only day you have a right to complain is the day God errs, and that day, my friend, will never come.

<sup>5</sup> Neale and Littledale quoted by Spurgeon, 394.

**2. The soul soaked by God's Word will revere the perfect deeds of God (vs 138).**

YOU HAVE COMMANDED YOUR TESTIMONIES IN  
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND EXCEEDING FAITHFULNESS (119:138).

The psalmist moves from stating the **fact** of God's righteousness to explaining the **act** of God's righteousness. God is not passively righteous. He does not just sit in heaven for an eternity of inert drowsiness. He commands His perfect testimonies, and He commands them in righteousness. This word "righteousness" describes His act of commanding, and the motive of His act is pure.

Many sinful men have used the pure Word of God as a sword of cruelty. They have shouted holy truths from hearts of murderous slander. But you will not find this in God's actions. Every word He gives and every command He makes is done in sinless perfection with motives so holy they would blind the naked eye.

But God's command is not only righteous, but also done in "exceeding faithfulness." The psalmist is on a chain of superlatives here. (How else do you describe the holy character of God? No human language can do it justice.) He does not just say that God commands in faithfulness, but in exceeding faithfulness. This word "exceeding" can be translated as "abundant," "much," or even "force." The idea is that God's faithfulness is indescribably abundant.

But what is God faithful to? God is Faithful to Himself. There is no entity higher than God's throne so if He is faithful, then He must be faithful to His own Word. What great comfort this can bring to every child of God! In spite of our shattered promises, broken oaths, and canceled vows, God will never lie, never deceive, and never mislead one of His children. God has not failed to keep even the smallest of His promises to us. Every single one will be fulfilled to the end.

**3. The believer soaked by the Scriptures will possess the cherished Word of God (vss 139-144).**

From verses 139-144, the psalmist expresses how the Word affects his life. He does not state isolated facts about God's Word, but communicates what it is doing to him. We like to separate ourselves from Scripture. We like to talk about what it says as if we were some data-gathering machine spitting out information. Many Bible students and believers are Word warriors and knights of truth as they debate doctrine. But it can become cold, impersonal and dead to their affections. The Word has run through their head but not their heart. They have closed, locked, and sealed the door to their heart so the Word cannot get in.

Beloved, the Word is not only to be a testimony of our mouth, but also a testimony of our life! We can speak abstractly about its facts and figures, but we

must also speak about it experientially, expressing what it does through and to us.

A believer must balance **knowing** Scripture and **applying** Scripture. A believer who loves to talk about doctrine but thinks little of applying it can become cold, lifeless, and arrogant. He can be like a cocky marine who received all the training but never knew the grit of white-knuckling a grenade while his comrades are blown to pieces just feet from his fox-hole. At the same time, the believer who lives to experience God but never studies His Word lives a life of mushy sentimentalism. His passion can become emotion-driven fluff that changes direction as fast as a wind vane. We must both know and apply the Scriptures.

MY ZEAL HAS CONSUMED ME, BECAUSE MY ADVERSARIES  
HAVE FORGOTTEN YOUR WORDS (119:139).

George Swinnock said, "Zeal is the heat or intension of the affections; it is a holy warmth, whereby our love and anger are drawn out to the utmost for God, and His glory."<sup>6</sup> The psalmist's zeal, his burning passion for God's glory, has consumed—literally possessed—him. He is so in love with God's Word that to see his enemies forgetting God's words bothers him to the point of emotional exhaustion. He feels wasted and dried up over other's disobedience! We often feel wasted over our own sin, but how often do we feel that way over the sins of others?

YOUR WORD IS VERY PURE,  
THEREFORE YOUR SERVANT LOVES IT (119:140).

The psalmist's high view of God's Word does not only produce consuming zeal, but also endearing love. The enormity of his pain over those who break God's Word is equal to the profundity of his love for the purity of God's Word. When you love something intensely, the object of your love can be a source of both dark sorrow and rapturous joy. You could not say that a man who shrugs at his wife's adultery truly loves her. Nor could you say that a man who never holds, cuddles, kisses, or serves his wife truly cares for her. If he loves her dearly, her sin will bring him deep grief and her godliness will bring him elated joy. Likewise, the psalmist is so in love with God's Word that to see it honored thrills him and to see it broken pains him.

But why does the psalmist love God's Word so much? The verse tells us, "Your word is very pure, therefore your servant loves it." This tells us about the heart of the psalmist.

<sup>6</sup> Swinnock quoted by Spurgeon, 394.

Many will love God's Word only because their parents love it. It is simply an emblem of their family tradition. Others will love God's Word only because their church loves it. In order to be accepted in the church they must accept the church's book, therefore they accept God's Word. If the church suddenly threw out the Bible and embraced the book of a different religion, so would the people, for their love was never for the Word itself but for acceptance in their religious circle.

But those whose hearts have been transformed by the blood of Christ and the mercy of God love purity and therefore, when they find that this book is pure, they cling to it with all their soul! Its purity makes them shout for joy!

In the final four verses the psalmist begins to reveal his condition of suffering, and he compares the desperation of his suffering to the comfort and encouragement of God's Word. The more he suffers, the more sufficient God's Word is proven to be. God's Word is the anchor of his soul.

I AM SMALL AND DESPISED,  
YET I DO NOT FORGET YOUR PRECEPTS (119:141).

The psalmist feels he is neither liked nor respected. He feels he is little and disregarded in the world's eyes. This is a good place to be. God often uses the unjust persecutions of the wicked to remind us that compared to God's holy majesty we are but specks of dust on the window sill that pass with the next breeze. When we face that reality, the precepts of God's Word mean more to us than life itself.

The Word is not precious to many a believer because he does not get low enough to look up to it. He is not willing to shrink his pride. He is always looking down on the Bible as if it were some optional instruction manual on how to have a better life. The Word is important to him but not vital, significant but not imperative. He affirms its inspiration and applauds its inerrancy, but does not crave it like a poisoned man craves the antidote, or a starving man yearns for bread.

Books about Christians who have suffered years of torture for refusing to blaspheme the name of Christ fill the shelves of countless libraries. After release from prison, they later testified that through many hours of torture, God's Word became dearer to them than their own life. Scriptures they had long forgotten suddenly flooded their minds during hours of excruciating pain. Likewise, some of David's most fervent psalms were written during his persecution by Saul.

Like lungs without oxygen is the believer without the Word of God. You must come low if you want to look high to the Word of God. Ancient commentator, Thomas Manton, makes the painfully true point that many Christians will not outright deny God's Word or reject it; many will quietly

forget it, which is a subtle form of rejection.

YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS,  
AND YOUR LAW IS TRUTH (119:142).

God is completely trustworthy in everything. God has not one single misdemeanor, lie, or unjust action on His record and His record is a very, very long one. God's righteousness is not momentary. It does not rise with the sun and disappear with its setting. It does not come like a storm and leave when the weather changes. Unlike man's, God's righteousness is eternal. There never was a day when it did not exist and if you try to reach the end of God's righteousness, you will not find it.

Consistency over a long period of time proves faithfulness. If God put His actions on a resume, the paper would have no beginning and no end, for His righteousness is eternal.

Whether you lose your job, fall into bankruptcy, or get diagnosed with terminal cancer, you still can trust God, whose righteousness has not and will not change.

The psalmist also says that God's law is truth. God's law never lies. The psalmist exalts God's righteousness and law in the middle of fierce suffering to remind both the reader and himself that God is worthy to be trusted completely.

TROUBLE AND ANGUISH HAVE COME UPON ME, YET YOUR  
COMMANDMENTS ARE MY DELIGHT (119:143).

Strangely, this word "trouble" actually means "narrow" in the English version. The psalmist is metaphorically bound in a tight place where he feels suffocated and claustrophobic. Yet, in the midst of this trouble and anguish he cries out with the ever comforting reminder that God's commandments are his delight!

Try explaining that to an unbeliever. What fool can feel delight in the midst of trouble and anguish? The same fool whose soul is saturated in God's Word! I am positively convinced that the more this psalmist suffers, the more he loves God's Word. Every blow of persecution drives him deeper and deeper into his love for God's Law.

The irony is that his love for the Word is the cause for his persecution. If eating a certain food caused your face to swell and your eyes to temporarily lose vision you would learn to detest that food. Why? Because it causes you pain. But the very Word that brings persecution to the psalmist only makes him love it more. And the more he loves it, the more his enemies persecute him for it, and the more they persecute him the more he drinks from its strength and loves it!

YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE RIGHTEOUS FOREVER;  
GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING THAT I MAY LIVE (119:144).

Again the psalmist exalts God's Word calling it eternally righteous. The believer is not to doubt the righteousness of God's testimonies for one instant, for never will there be a day where he will find them to be unrighteous.

As he has done many times before, the psalmist asks for understanding while under the trial of persecution. Although the psalmist knows the character of God's Word, he does not fully understand it. He knows that God alone can give him the understanding he needs in the midst of turmoil. The Word is his single hope so that he does not die of despair. His very life is dependent on the Word of God.



In this chapter we have looked at three steps that can help you to experience God's Word:

- 1) Embrace the holy character of God (vs 137)
- 2) Revere the perfect deeds of God (vs 138)
- 3) Possess the cherished Word of God (vss 139-144)

*Many truths are lost because ministers pour their wines into sieves, either into leaky memories or feathery minds. Meditation is like a soaking rain that goes to the root of the tree and makes it bring forth fruit.*

~ Thomas Watson ~

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPLATION

1. Why is studying the Word of God not enough? Why is it so important to experience the Word as well?
2. What does it mean to possess God's Word?
3. Go through the verses and note how the psalmist feels about God's Word. Now compare these feelings to yours. Do you feel the same way about the Word of God? What needs to change in your life so that your affection for God's Word will grow?