

**“LOVING GOD’S WORD”**  
**A Sermon Preached at**  
**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**Belleville, IL**  
**By The Rev. Rob Dyer**  
**June 29, 2025**  
(transcribed from audio file)

Siblings in Christ, today’s scripture reading comes from the book of Psalms 119. We’re going to start right in the middle at verse 97 so listen carefully for God’s Word.

Psalm 119:97-105.

*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.  
Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine  
enemies: for they are ever with me.  
I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies  
are my meditation.  
I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.  
I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy  
word.  
I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.  
How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my  
mouth!  
Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false  
way.  
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.      NRSV*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Well as we have already reflected upon this being June Cox’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday weekend, she did pick all the music for our worship service today. She didn’t pick the scripture passage though. Pastor likes control. We already had another worship theme planned cause we plan several months in advance, but I thought, I want to pick something appropriate for the occasion, something for this day to be special. Then I thought, what if I picked one of the verses in the Bible that was actually verse 100, you know. That’s the day when I realized there is only one verse 100 in the entire Bible. No other chapter goes beyond 100 verses other than Psalm 119.

Now it mainly happened in that particular writing because of the way it is structured. It was written in such a way that it was meant to be long. The longest chapter in our entire Bible was meant to reflect upon how wonderful God's Word is. As you were reading the very verses that speak of it, it is talking about this holy scripture you have in front of you.

And what is even more fascinating is that the 100<sup>th</sup> verse actually says, I have more understanding than the aged because I follow your precepts. The idea that no matter how many years we have to live, there is no wisdom we can bring together, even if we're blessed with 100 years or more, there's nothing we can accumulate ourselves from our own understanding that will be greater than what God has to offer us in the words of the Bible that we have.

Now it's this long for a reason because of the way it was structured. Psalm 119 is actually an acrostic poem which now all of a sudden all English teachers went "Ooh. Oh. That's interesting." And the rest of you went "Huh?" Acrostic poem is one where most often it's done where each line is a different letter. And so, if we were to do it with our alphabet the first line of the poem would begin with the letter A. Then the second line would begin with a word that begins with B, and the third line would be a C. That's if we did that in English.

In Hebrew though they have 22 letters and they decided that with each one of these they would do 8 verses with each letter, so  $8 \times 22$  – math nerds out there – 176. There you go. Winner, winner, chicken dinner. 176 verses, so the first 8 lines in the original Hebrew way of writing this all begin with words that begin with Aleph, which is the first Hebrew letter. Then Bet which is the second Hebrew letter, so on and so forth. Because we've translated it in English, we've completely lost this aspect of the poem. We're in the section that would have been the 13<sup>th</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet, mem, which is kinda like our letter M, so each of those lines actually began with Hebrew words that had that m'mm sound in the beginning of it.

You'll notice that we had 9 verses today. I cheated because I couldn't help it. That very next verse was that wonderful line about your word is the light, lamp . . . . I mean it's just a great verse and I had to throw that in too.

But the whole dedication of this passage is to convey how worthwhile it is that we have a connection with God's Word, that we take time to read God's Word. It's getting harder for people to give the time for this it seems because quite frankly the competition for your attention is just way too high nowadays.

You realize that in the early days of the church, long before June was ever born, the church was the hub of what was interesting and happening in the community. No other building would be as beautiful as the church in that community. No other place could you come and hear learned thoughts about the big questions of life. Nowhere else in the community could you hear music as beautiful as what you would hear in that church building. The tradition of stained glass in churches that we have here, this all came out of creating beautiful things for the people to look at when they came into worship.

We can do all sorts of things, but we are not going to be the most interesting thing you could do with your day. The church is now in the midst of an entire culture where there are plenty of places for you to listen to great music and you can access it immediately. You can hold it in your hand anywhere you go. There are so many beautiful things for you to see. There are amazing ways to learn now that we've never had before. All sorts of things have changed over the years.

Some of you, even those of you who haven't been blessed with 100 years of life, I'm sure there are things that were popular or a regular part of life when you were young that now are no more. What are some of those things. Go ahead. Raise your hand. Something that you remember from when you were younger that just isn't around anymore.

Smoking! Not true for everyone, but definitely a different thing now.

Watch only cartoons on Saturday. It was all you could get and there weren't that many channels, right? Oh my goodness. Remember when you had to actually go to the TV set, turn the dial, to change channels.

TV went off the air at midnight!

Rotary phones! And you had the phone that had the long cord on it so you could walk around the house and still be connected to it.

Businesses closed on Sunday.

Bicycles out everywhere. Every kid had a bicycle.

Things change don't they and so we move along. So, church changes. The song that June picked for us to hear that Matt sang, Amazing Grace. You realize that at one point there was someone who sat in a church and said, "I don't like that new

Amazing Grace song.” You know Jesus and his disciples weren’t singing Amazing Grace. Right? 250 years ago a pastor wrote a poem called Amazing Grace and people thought it was great and then they started puttin’ it to different tunes and somewhere around 200 years ago there was one tune that seemed to stick and that’s basically the one that Matt just sang today. But there was a period of time where that was one of those new fangled worship songs. “It was just written by some pastor who wrote a poem. I can’t believe we actually sing that in church.” And then time went on and now you all can’t imagine a world where we don’t have Amazing Grace at some point sung in the church on a regular basis.

Things change and it gets harder and harder for us to devote our time to our faith because I’ll tell you what, the world is getting better and better at getting your attention and keeping it. And there’s not just 2 channels; not just 13 channels, and now I can sit back and press a button, and now I can just talk at the TV, and it will go to what I want it to do.

I mean, the idea of taking time to sit down and read God’s Word, that’s a tough sell. Recently I found out about this app called Shepherd and I’m trying it out on some of the young people in our church. I’m trying it and I gave it to them to try. It’s called Shepherd and the idea is to help you read your Bible more. And what happens is you get a little sheep on your screen and every day that you read what you are supposed to read that day, well the sheep gets a little happier. It gets a little party hat. It grows bigger and stronger. It gets a bigger smile on its face it’s so happy. And maybe fireworks go off behind it and it’s just having a great day, but if you don’t read your Bible every day it starts to get smaller, and it gets sad, and then it gets sick, and if you don’t read your Bible, it dies. Happy Bible reading everybody! Will this help people to read their Bible more? I don’t know! Maybe!

I was having this conversation with one of the young adults in our church recently and they had this observation. They said, “You know, the fun stuff makes life fun, but it’s often the boring stuff that makes life good.” I made them repeat that back to me again. The fun stuff makes life fun, but it’s often the boring stuff that makes life good. Now I really don’t want to spend a sermon telling you church is boring but it’s good for you, so come on and give it a whirl. But let’s be honest. Having a discipline about your faith, regular prayer, regular reading your Bible, this is not going to be the most gee whiz exciting moment, but you do other things because you know that it’s good for you, right?

I mean, most of you brush your teeth every day, right? Please! I don’t know about you but I’m never like, ooh this is a good time I’m havin’ right here. I mean, look if

brushing your teeth is the highlight of your day, we gotta get you a hobby, but it's good for you, right? It's a good thing.

It's hard for us to do those good things and I'm telling you this giving of your life to following Jesus, this giving of moments of your life to engaging in God's Word and prayer, this is the good stuff that can make your life good. It may be a little harder to apply the attention to it but it's part of that which makes life good.

And so, in some ways, you the modern Christian, you've got a little tougher than those who worshipped, than those who 200 years ago were complaining about Amazing Grace. You've got it tougher because you have a lot more options, a lot more things to pull at your attention, but what has not changed over all the centuries is that the Word of God is a gift to us, a guide to us.

You can look at all the great self-help books over the decades going back well over 100 years, the books that people read that were always so popular and they are titles now that nobody reads. But the words contained in the Bible, for thousands of years they have brought life and goodness into people's lives. So maybe there is some wisdom that we don't necessarily have to rush to the top self-help book to help us in our life today. Think about the one that has endured thousands of years of humanity, and yet still has goodness and grace and mercy and love and a message of hope to rule every single day. This is a gift given to us.

We have this precious scripture, this one that we read today, the longest in all of our Bible, dedicated to emphasizing that point to us. Perhaps we should hear these words, and if we are so lucky, if we are so lucky to be blessed with a 100 years to live, would it not be wonderful to think that through it all we came into a fuller understanding and connection and relationship with our God. I dare to say it would probably be far more rewarding in your life than all the other things that pull at you and push at you and drag your attention away from that which would make life truly great.

Give it a bit of your time. Give it a bit of your heart and if you gotta download an app and keep a sheep alive to do it, then do it.

To God be the glory. Halleluiah and Amen.