

## How to Have a Relationship with God

### A Study of Psalm 19

Characteristic of Completeness: Authority of the Bible

Big Idea: God is waiting to have a conversation with you; learn His language.

Related Scriptures: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119; 139:23-24; Isaiah 40:12, 26; Jeremiah 17:9; John 16:13; Romans 1:20; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12

Introduction:

- A. Sometimes we evangelical Christians use language that can be confusing. For example, sometimes we talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus. You may have heard a question like, “Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord?” More often than not, when an evangelical asks, “Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord?” I suspect he is asking whether or not you are saved, whether or not you are a born-again Christian, whether or not you are going to heaven. The idea of having a personal relationship with the Lord is often equated with being a Christian. The common idea is that, if you have a personal relationship with Jesus, then you are a Christian. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, then you are not a Christian.

- B. But in our culture, what does having a personal relationship really mean? Having a relationship with someone usually means far more than just being related.

For example, our Youth Pastor, Tom Cox, has never known his natural father. Early on, his father left, so Tom grew up without a father. Last week at our Teaching Team meeting, I wanted to make a point, so I asked Tom about his father: “Are you his son?”

Tom said, “Yes.”

Then I asked, “Do you have a relationship with your father?”

Tom said, “No.” You see, for Tom, being related to his father is very different than having a relationship with his father.

Similarly, I’ve spoken with married couples who come for counseling. The wife may say something like, “We’ve been married for years, but we have no relationship. There’s nothing there. We just coexist.” For the wife, being legally related to her husband is very different than having a relationship with her husband.

Having a relationship involves communication, exchange, sharing, back-and-forth conversation about who we are and where our heart is, including thoughts and ideas and hopes and dreams and emotions and hurts and disappointments and celebrations and questions and concerns and intentions and plans.

Being related to someone is no guarantee that we have a relationship with them. In fact, we can be related to someone and have no relationship at all.

- C. In light of this, I'd like to float an idea that may at first seem unsettling. Here it is: While all believers in Jesus Christ are related to the Lord, few believers have much of a personal relationship with Him—not in the way we normally understand having a relationship. Let me run that by you one more time. While all believers in Jesus Christ are related to the Lord, few believers have much of a personal relationship with Him.

I know I have some explaining to do.

1. First, let me explain how it is a person becomes related to God. By His death and resurrection for our sins, Jesus Christ alone offers eternal life and adoption into His forever family to all who will simply believe Him for it. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, we are adopted into God's forever family. Before we believe in Jesus for eternal life, we *are not* related to God. After we believe in Jesus, we *are* related to God as His children. Being related to God means we are saved from the penalty of our sin; we are born-again; we are going to heaven; we are true Christians.

Becoming related to God in this way is a one-sided deal. By His grace, God alone offers this gift of being related to Him, and it's absolutely free. Christ's death on a cross is the price God paid for our gift. It is "a gift that costs everything for [God] the giver and nothing for [us] the recipient[s]."<sup>1</sup> We simply receive the gift by faith. If you'd like to know more about how to become related to God, I'd be happy to talk with you about it.

2. But becoming related to God is very different than having a relationship with Him. I believe you can be born-again into God's forever family and not have much of a relationship with your heavenly Father. Becoming related to God is certainly necessary to build a relationship with God, but the building doesn't happen automatically.

Having become related through adoption, we, as God's children, are to grow up learning the language of our heavenly Father so that we can converse with Him and enjoy Him and have a relationship with Him.

3. Many believers settle for just being related to God, thinking that's all there is to the relationship. After being born again, perhaps they grow up learning the language of their church, but never learn the language of their heavenly Father. And so, they hear a lot *about* God, but rarely hear *from* God. It's not

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 25.

that God doesn't speak; it's that they haven't learned His language. That's why I contend that many believers don't have much of a relationship with God.

What people hear *about* God can be helpful, informative, encouraging, and even motivating. But it is rarely life-changing. Hearing *about* God is one thing; hearing *from* God is quite another. It's hearing *from* God that transforms your life.

But in order to hear *from* God, we must develop an understanding of His language. We must become increasingly conversant in His way of communicating. We must be trained to pick up the nuances of His messages to us, both verbal and nonverbal. And this is a life-long process of learning and growth in conversation with God.

I believe God is waiting to have a conversation with every one of His children. But many of His children are simply not entering the conversation because they are not learning His language. And so, the big idea of my message is ► this: God is waiting to have a conversation with you; learn His language.

- D. Today we are going to study a part of the Bible that teaches us about God's language. The text is ► Psalm 19. It is a poem or song written by David. C.S. ► Lewis calls Psalm 19, "the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."<sup>2</sup> From Psalm 19, we're going to learn a little more about how to have a relationship with God.<sup>3</sup>
- I. The first ► ten verses of Psalm 19 cover two important ways that God communicates to us. They constitute a grand overture God makes toward us. God initiates a conversation with us, and then He waits for us to enter into the conversation with Him.
  - A. Verses ► 1-6 speak of God's nonverbal language.

- 1. Verses ► 1 and 2 say,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>1</sup> The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958), 63.

<sup>3</sup> The superscription can provide information about a psalm that can be significant. The superscription of Psalm 19 identifies the author as David. It also says that this is a "psalm." Fifty-seven of the 150 psalms in the Bible contain the word, "psalm" in the superscription. It comes from the Hebrew word, *mizmor* that denotes a song that was to be accompanied by musical instruments. The superscription also says that Psalm 19 is "for the choir director." We're not exactly sure what this means, but it may mean that the words were to be recited or sung by the leader of the temple worship team. Just as songs today are categorized as pop, country-western, heavy-metal, or classical, so too, the psalms in the Bible are categorized. But, the psalms are categorized based on the words, not the music. And, Bible scholars aren't too sure how to categorize Psalm 19. It doesn't fit neatly into any one of the mainstream categories (See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalm 1-50, Word Bible Commentary*, vol. 19, eds. David A. Hubbard, John D. W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 179-180.)

And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

<sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech,  
And night to night reveals knowledge.

- a. I want you to notice the ► verbs here that indicate what God is doing through the heavens. Through the heavens, God is telling, declaring, pouring forth speech, and revealing. That is, He is communicating to us. He is revealing something about Himself to us. His is telling us about ► His glory, His work.
- b. The name for ► God is significant here. In the Hebrew language in which this was originally written, there are various names for God, each one emphasizing a different aspect of His character. The Hebrew word for God here is *El*. It “is the designation for God as father creator of all.”<sup>4</sup> It emphasizes God’s power.<sup>5</sup>
- c. Indeed, through the skies God tells us about His power. Specifically, ► Verse 1 says “their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”
  - 1) Astronomers have calculated that the stars in our galaxy alone number in the hundreds of billions. Our galaxy, in turn, is only one of millions of galaxies within sight of our largest telescopes.<sup>6</sup> So, there are millions upon billions of stars that God created. With that in mind listen to Isaiah ► 40:26:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Isaiah 40:26**

Lift up your eyes on high  
And see who has created these *stars*,  
The One who leads forth their host by number,  
He calls them all by name;  
Because of the greatness of His might and the  
strength of *His* power,  
Not one *of them* is missing.

Think of it. God not only created all the stars, He’s got names for all of them. I figured this out. If we could somehow speak the names of the stars at a rate of one per second, it would take over 19 thousand trillion years just to

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<sup>4</sup> James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, eds. James L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller, and Paul J. Achtemeier, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 98.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Owen Gingerich, *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2004 DVD Plus*, s.v. “Star (astronomy),” (Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 1993-2003). “Modern astronomers believe there are more than  $1 \times 10^{22}$  stars in the universe.”

name them all.<sup>7</sup> The expanse of the skies is declaring the work of His hands!

- 2) Light travels at a speed of about 186,000 miles per second. A light year is the distance that light travels in a year. The faintest galaxy astronomers have been able to observe is estimated to be 13 billion light-years away from us.<sup>8</sup> With that in mind, listen to Isaiah ► 40:12 as it speaks of God:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Isaiah 40:12** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand,  
And marked off the heavens by the span . . . ?

This is saying that God marks off the universe—billions of light years—with the span of His hand. The expanse of the skies is declaring the work of His hands!

- 3) And, the universe displays undeniable order and design. In fact, American cosmologist Donald Page has calculated the probability that the order of our universe would exist by chance alone. The odds are one chance in 10 to the 124<sup>th</sup> power!<sup>9</sup> That’s essentially impossible. The expanse of the skies is declaring the work of His hands.

- d. And this declaration is a consistent reminder to us. Verse 2 tells us that, through the skies, God communicates to us ► day to day and night to night. We have a continual reminder of God’s power and providence. How could anybody miss it?

2. Verses ► 3 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words;  
Their voice is not heard.

God’s communication through the skies is nonverbal. It is silent. No speech. No words. No sound. The communication comes only through careful

<sup>7</sup>  $10^{22}$  stars (1 second to name each star) (1 hour/ 60 seconds) (1 day/24 hours) (1 year/365 days) = 19,025,875,190,258,752 years.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald A. Schorn, *Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2004 DVD Plus*, s.v. “Hubble and the Cosmos,” (Redmond, WA: Microsoft, 1993-2003).

<sup>9</sup> Donald Page, cited in L. Stafford Betty and Bruce Cordell, “God and Modern Science: New Life for the Teleological Argument,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1987): 416, and quoted by William Lane Craig, available from <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/jesseph-craig2.html>; internet; accessed 23 February 2006.

observation and reflection. To the extent that we do not observe and reflect upon the skies, we ignore what they are telling us about God.

3. And, the nonverbal communication is available to all. The first part of ► Verse 4 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their utterances to the end of the world. . . .<sup>10</sup>

4. Verses ► 4 through 6 wrap up this portion of the psalm by saying,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>4</sup> . . . In them He has placed a tent for the sun,  
<sup>5</sup> Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber;  
It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.  
<sup>6</sup> Its rising is from one end of the heavens,  
And its circuit to the other end of them;  
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

This is a highly poetic description of the daily rising and setting of the sun as a testimony to God's glory and power. And I suspect it is also a testimony to God's desire to have a relationship with His people. Notice that the sun is described as a ► bridegroom. Elsewhere in Scripture, the relationship between God and His people is described by the metaphor of marriage. God is the bridegroom; His people are the bride. Perhaps the daily rising of the sun is a metaphor for the daily overture of God, inviting conversation with His people.

5. So ► how can we learn this nonverbal language? What exactly is God saying through the heavens?

Here's one thing I'm beginning to understand when I still myself long enough to listen. When I'm confused, when I'm disoriented, when I'm feeling lost and alone, when I don't seem to be getting answers, when I'm tempted to think God needs some help to fix my situation, when I'm tempted to think God is not speaking to me, the heavens tell me this: If He's is big enough to create and manage the universe, He's certainly big enough to manage my situation. If He has bothered to name the stars that are not made in His image, how much more is He paying attention to me, His child, whom He *has* made in His image? He has created the universe to tell me that He can be

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<sup>10</sup> The universal communication of God through His creation is also explained elsewhere in the Bible. For example, Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

trusted. He knows what He's doing. He's the Designer. I'm learning His nonverbal language.

B. Having discussed God's nonverbal language in Verses 1-6, David now turns to God's ► verbal language in Verses 7-10.

1. A number of things come in six-packs in this passage. For example, in Verses 7-9, I want you to notice six terms used to describe God's specific words to us. See if you can pick them out as I ► read the passage.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the  
eyes.

<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous  
altogether.

The terms used to describe God's verbal communication to us ► include the "law," the "testimony," the "precepts," the "commandment," the "fear," and the "judgments."

- a. The word, "law" comes from the Hebrew term, *torah*. It has the broadest meaning of all the terms. It is used to describe some type of instruction, or a set of rules, or even a way of life handed down from one person to another. Here it is used as the comprehensive term for God's revealed will. The other words may be viewed as various facets of this general word, *torah*.<sup>11</sup>
- b. The word, "testimony" refers to that which God has provided that gives us first-hand evidence of who He is and what He is like.<sup>12</sup>
- c. The word, "precepts" is a term for the specific responsibilities God places on His people.
- d. The word, "commandment" refers to the authority with which God instructs us.

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Wretling, Hebrew class notes, Western Seminary.

<sup>12</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "תִּוְרָה," (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

- e. The word, “fear” refers to the awe or reverence engendered by God’s authoritative instructions.
  - f. The word, “judgments” refers to the judicial decisions of God who governs.
2. All of the synonyms for the Scriptures are qualified with the phrase, ► “of the LORD.” Remember, I said that there are various Hebrew names for God. The term, LORD here comes from the Hebrew word, *Yahweh*. The basic meaning of the name is “one who is for His people.”<sup>13</sup> It describes God as one who enters into a *personal* relationship with His people.

This marks a significant transition in this psalm. Back in Verse 1, the name for God was *El*, emphasizing that God is powerful, as revealed by the skies. Now, the name for God is *Yahweh*, emphasizing that God is personal, as revealed by the Scriptures. Specifically, the Scriptures reveal to us how we can be rightly related to God.

This is a remarkable transition. The God who is above all, above all wants to have a relationship with you. The God who measures the universe with His hand is extending His hand to you. The God who created time wants to spend time with you. And, the Scriptures are the specific means by which He reveals Himself.

3. In Verses 7-9, I want you to notice another ► six-pack of characteristics or adjectives related to the Scriptures. The terms used are “perfect,” “sure,” “right,” “pure,” “clean,” and “true.”
- a. “Perfect” means God’s Word is flawless and complete.
  - b. “Sure” means God’s Word is faithful and trustworthy.
  - c. “Right” means God’s Word is morally right or just.
  - d. The words, “pure” and “clean” mean God’s Word is clear, without any impurity of falsehood.
  - e. “True” means that God’s Word is dependable because it’s the absolute truth.
4. Now I want you to notice another ► six-pack of benefits of the Scriptures articulated in Verses 7-9.

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<sup>13</sup> Ronald Allen, notes from Theology Proper class, Western Seminary.

- a. The Word of God restores the soul in that it provides healing to the whole person by instructing us how to be right with God, assuring us of His forgiveness and cleansing by faith, according to His provision and promises.
  - b. The Word of God is the source of wisdom to all who receive it, particularly those who are spiritually simple or immature or easily confused.
  - c. The Word of God is a source of joy and a heartfelt inner peace.
  - d. The Word of God is enlightening. It minimizes confusion. One commentator says this “refers not merely to the enlightening of the understanding, but of one’s whole condition; it makes the mind clear, and body as well as mind healthy and fresh, for the darkness of the eyes is sorrow, melancholy, and bewilderment.”<sup>14</sup>
  - e. The Word of God endures forever. It is never out of date. It is always relevant.
  - f. And, finally, the Word of God is righteous. It is absolutely fair and just.
5. In light of all this, ► Verse 10 says of the Scriptures:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

6. So how can we learn this verbal language of God? What exactly is God saying through the Scriptures?

The more I learn, the more I feel like I’m just scratching the surface. But one thing stands out to me. I’m beginning to learn how to look for the Person behind the precepts. God is not just offering His words; He is offering Himself through His words. His words are the vehicle through which He conveys His heart. So, as I read the Bible, I’m learning to ► ask myself, “What is God trying to tell me about Himself?”

For example, let me try to personalize all the characteristics of God’s verbal language from our text in the form of a question. Here’s the ► question:

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<sup>14</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Psalms, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 5, 2ed., translated by Francis Bolton, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, reprinted 1975), 286.

Would you want to enter into conversation with a person who you know is on your side and truly wants to communicate with you; ► a person whose words are always perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true; ► a person in whose presence your soul is restored, your thinking is clarified, your heart is made joyful and peaceful; ► a person who is always available; ► a person who is always completely fair and just; ► a person whose words are exceedingly valuable and desirable?

Of course you would. God is that Person. Through His Word, He makes an overture; He reveals Himself as the sublime conversationalist. And He is waiting to have a conversation with you; learn His language.

II. Verses ► 11-14 record David's response to God's overture. David has listened to God speaking to him through the heavens and through His Word, and now David enters the conversation in worshipful, conversational response. The way David enters the conversation tells us a lot about learning God's language.

A. Verse ► 11 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them [God's words] Your servant is warned;  
In keeping them there is great reward.

1. Notice this is the first time David addresses God directly in this psalm. He describes himself to God as, ► "*Your* servant." Previously, David speaks of God, saying, "He" and "His"; now David says, "Your." That David now addresses God personally tells us that he has experienced the person of God, not just the words of God. This is an important point.

When we read the Bible, we are to do so with the perspective that this is a message *from* God, not just a message *about* God. We are to read the Bible not as an impersonal documentary, but as a love letter addressed personally to us—a letter that invites a response—a letter that demands personal application. Bruce ► Demarest, a seminary professor and author explains,

"Christians must not stop at the word God speaks, but press on until we encounter the God who speaks the Word."<sup>15</sup>

Another teacher and author, Eugene ► Peterson, adds,

"We read and enter and before long we, in some surprise, say, 'Oh, this has to do with me! God's word is addressed to me—I'm the one spoken to.'"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 98.

<sup>16</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 103.

Unfortunately, many believers rarely if ever get to the surprise: “Oh, this has to do with me!” Peterson goes on to make this sobering ► statement:

“It is entirely possible to come to the Bible in total sincerity, responding to the intellectual challenge it gives, or for the moral guidance it offers, or for the spiritual uplift it provides, and not in any way have to deal with a personally revealing God who has personal designs on you.”<sup>17</sup>

Think of it. God reveals Himself to you because He has personal designs on you. But we can miss this entirely. We can read and study the Bible until the cows come home, but unless we reach the point where it is applied to our lives specifically and personally, we don’t have much of a relationship with God. A simple question can be revealing: What are you hearing from God these days about His personal designs on you? In what area of your life do you sense God speaking to you, and what specifically is He calling you to do?

2. Notice also, back in ► Verse 11, that David describes himself to God as “Your *servant*.” That David identifies himself as a servant reflects a submissive mindset that is crucial to learning the language of God. God is our Master, and we are His servants. What God says is our highest authority for what to believe and how to live. This bears testimony to the authority of the Bible over our lives. In fact, ► the authority of the Bible is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week.

We evangelicals concur that the Bible is our highest authority under God—it’s a part of what defines us as evangelicals. But we don’t always act like we really believe this. In fact, we often live not according to the biblical text, but according to a different text. Peterson ► says,

“But the ‘text’ that seems to be most in favor on the American landscape today is the sovereign self.”<sup>18</sup>

The sovereign self asks God to bless our own agenda instead of seeking God’s agenda. The sovereign self can never seem to find time to read and apply the Bible. Why? Because it’s not terribly important to its own agenda.

But we must ask ourselves, who is the servant in this relationship? God is not the servant of our agenda or our life story. We are the servant of His story—a story we can only learn and enter into by diligent application of His Word to our lives. Peterson ► says,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 16.

“When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but our stories in God’s.”<sup>19</sup>

▶ “One of the most urgent tasks facing the Christian community today is to counter . . . self-sovereignty by reasserting what it means to live these Holy Scriptures from the inside out, instead of using them for our sincere and devout but still self-sovereign purposes.”<sup>20</sup>

Bible scholar and author ▶ Kenneth Boa sums it up well.

“We cannot follow Jesus when we are asking him to follow us.”<sup>21</sup>

3. Back in ▶ Verse 11, it says there is great reward in keeping God’s commands.<sup>22</sup> “Keeping” means applying and obeying. “Keeping” means letting go of our own selfish story and entering into God’s story.

B. It is apparent that David listens to God speaking to his own soul, speaking to his own situation, illuminating the darkness of his own heart. This is an important part of learning the language. David asks in ▶ Verse 12,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>12</sup> Who can discern *his* errors? . . .

David is asking the question, “Who can understand his own sinfulness apart from you, God?” The answer is “no one.”<sup>23</sup> Jeremiah ▶ 17:9 explains,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Jeremiah 17:9** “The heart is more deceitful than all else  
And is desperately sick;  
Who can understand it?”

No one can understand his own heart apart from God’s help. Therefore, if I am disconnected from God’s Word, I can fully expect to be completely deceived, and I can

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 369.

<sup>22</sup> It reminds me of Joshua 1:8 which says, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” And 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reiterates, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

<sup>23</sup> Donald Williams, *Psalms 1-72, Mastering the Old Testament*, vol. 13, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, (Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1986), 156.

fully expect to make poor choices. God's instructions in the Scriptures are absolutely essential for searching my own heart. Hebrews ► 4:12 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This makes me wonder. When I read the Bible, how come it doesn't always seem to be "living" or "active" or "sharp" or "piercing" or "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"?

I have found that the Word is able to pierce and to judge my heart only as I take the time and the risk to open myself up to what God is trying to say to me personally. David models such openness in ► Psalm 139:23-24, where he prays,

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 139:**  
<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
 Try me and know my anxious thoughts;  
<sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me,  
 And lead me in the everlasting way.

Demarest offers us some practical advice, ► saying,

"Carefully attend to what God, through the Spirit, may be saying to you. Then ask God, 'How do You want me to respond to what You're saying?'"<sup>24</sup>

When you do that, the Spirit of God will guide you. John ► 16:13 says,

<sup>NAU</sup> **John 16:13** "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth . . ."

I don't think this just means that the Spirit will keep your theology orthodox. It also means that the Spirit will reveal the truth about you and the truth about how God wants you to fit into His story.

C. David hears what God is saying and continues the conversation in ► Verses 12 and 13:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**  
<sup>12</sup> . . . Acquit me of hidden *faults*.  
<sup>13</sup> Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*;  
 Let them not rule over me;

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<sup>24</sup> Demarest, 138.

Then I will be blameless,  
And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.

David is asking God to forgive him of the ► “hidden faults.” It seems that these are the hidden motivations of the heart—the motivations that the Word of God brings to light. Why am I working so many hours? Why am I pursuing this degree? Why am I avoiding what I know I need to do? Why am I so self protective? Why am I so angry? Why do I look to others instead of God to meet my needs?

Furthermore, David is asking God to protect him from getting into more sins. That’s what he means when he says, “keep back your servant from ► presumptuous [or willful] sins; let them not rule over me.”

When he says, ► “then I will be blameless” he doesn’t mean he’ll be sinlessly perfect. He just means that he’ll be right with God because he “shall be ► acquitted of great transgression.”

This is an important point. The Scriptures are not a means of self-righteousness, but of grace. You see, when we follow God’s instructions, when we search the skies, search the Scriptures, and search our hearts, it won’t prompt us to praise ourselves because we’re so great, it will prompt us to praise God because He is so great and so gracious to forgive us and to guide us.

D. David concludes with ► Verse 14.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Psalm 19:**

<sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

I suspect that David is referring to the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart in his conversation with God in this very psalm.<sup>25</sup>

1. The Hebrew word for ► “meditation” is *higgayon*. It has the basic meaning of a low sound.<sup>26</sup> It can describe talking, or prayerful meditation, or even the playing of music.<sup>27</sup> In Isaiah 31:4, the word is used to describe the growling or purring of a lion over its prey. The picture is of a hungry lion so delighted by his meal that he gratefully purrs over it. It’s as if David’s heart is delighted over the spiritual food of God’s Word. He has tasted it, chewed it, savored it,

<sup>25</sup> Mays, 100.

<sup>26</sup> TWOT, s.v. “הַגִּיּוֹן.”

<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “הַגִּיּוֹן,” (Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1994-2000), hereinafter referred to as HALOT.

consumed it. His heart meditates in response, uttering a low sound of gratefulness.

► “Why do I meditate?” asks Dietrich Bonhoeffer, noted pastor and social activist in Nazi Germany. “Because I am a Christian. Therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God’s Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me.”<sup>28</sup>

2. According to ► Verse 14, the Lord is David’s rock. That is, *Yahweh*, the one who is for His people, is his source of his stability. He knows it because *Yahweh* tells him so.
3. And, *Yahweh* is David’s ► Redeemer. In ancient biblical times, sometimes things would get so tough for an Israelite that he would sell himself as a slave. It was an ancient form of bankruptcy. “Redeemer” was a word used for the person who bought such a slave for the purpose of setting him free. Our Redeemer has set us free to have a relationship with Him.

Through His creation, we see the power of our Redeemer. Through His Word we see the story of our Redeemer. Through application of His Word to our hearts, we see our rightful place in our Redeemer’s story.

III. I want to return to a question I posed ► earlier: What are you hearing from God these days about His personal designs on you? God is waiting to have a conversation with you; learn His language. Let me close with ► three friendly challenges.

- A. First, would you be willing to still yourself before God for ► thirty minutes each day this week? To carefully consider what God, through the Spirit, may be saying to you through a single passage—any passage—from His Word. To ask God, “How do You want me to respond to what You’re saying?”

Some of you may be thinking, “Thirty minutes! What would that look like? How would I fill the time?” Let me tell you how it went for me recently, as I considered Psalm 19.

It’s important for me to spend uninterrupted time with God in solitude and silence, so I spend time with God very early in the morning on weekdays. I get a cup of coffee and sit in my comfortable chair. I put a pen and pad beside me.

I take a couple of slow, deep breaths and I thank God for His presence and His Word. I say, “Lord, would You please speak to me through Your Word? Please help me to understand what You want to say to me.”

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<sup>28</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, ed. David Gracie (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1986), 30, quoted by Demarest, 123.

I sip my coffee and then I begin to read Psalm 19. I read it through slowly and silently. Then I read it out low, in a whisper, so I won't wake up Cathy. Again I pray, "Lord, what does this tell me about You? What does this tell me about me?" I'm looking for a principle—a timeless truth about God or me.

I quietly linger over each word. Then a distraction pops into my head: Do I need to take the dogs to the groomer today? Not sure. I write it down on the pad next to me so I don't have to worry about forgetting to check on this, and I try to refocus. I read again.

Gradually, I begin to see the Person behind the words. His glory. His power. His heart. And I respond to this, not usually with words, but more often with something like the low sound of meditation that David mentions. It's not tongues or a mantra. It's more like a conversational sigh of appreciation.

The principle I look for emerges. I see in Psalm 19 that God wants to have a conversation with me. I see His nonverbal and verbal language. And over a period of days I keep asking, "Lord, how do You want me to respond to this?"

God doesn't speak to me audibly, but as I continue to shift, a nugget of application emerges. God says something like, "Bob, you're often so anxious and preoccupied with telling people *about* Me in your 'impressive' sermons that you're not taking the time to hear *from* Me. I want to spend time with you."

As I reflect, I realize that, in my quiet times, I too often drift into trying to address the question, "How can I fashion this into a sermon" rather than "Lord, how do you want *me* to respond to this?"

And so I join David in saying, "Acquit me, Lord, of my hidden faults." A renewed resolve to dedicate thirty minutes daily to hearing from God and learning His language emerges. Would you be willing to join me this week in spending 30 minutes daily in conversation with God?<sup>29</sup>

- B. Second, would you be willing to enter into the accountability and encouragement of ► a Life Group? At Moon Valley, Life Groups can be viewed as small groups of people at all different levels of fluency who are learning God's language together. Call the office or get in touch with me if you'd like more information.
- C. Third, when the sovereign self objects to these challenges and becomes impatient because learning the language takes work and time, ► don't give up. When you're tempted to give up, ask yourself this question: Do I want to learn to enter into

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<sup>29</sup> I commend three sources for further reading on how this can work. An article I wrote titled, "How to Apply the Bible to Your Life Today," is in the "Grow" section of the MVBC *Life Group Guide*. Chapter Five ("Word That Feeds the Soul") of Demarest's book, *Satisfy Your Soul*, is helpful. Also, the first seven chapters of Peterson's book, *Eat This Book* can be helpful.

conversation with a person who I know is on my side and truly wants to communicate with me; a person whose words are always perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true; a person in whose presence my soul is restored, my thinking is clarified, my heart is made joyful and peaceful; a person who is always available; a person who is always completely fair and just; a person whose words are exceedingly valuable and desirable?

God is waiting to have a conversation with you; learn His language.