

- ***READ Psalm 119:33-40*** You might remember a lesson we did a couple years ago in which we considered this 119th Psalm and came away with the conclusion that this Psalm could be labeled as the Bible Psalm because it is basically a dissertation on the importance of God's Word to the author. Even just within the eight verses that we read together, the Word of God is referenced no less than eight times. It is referred to as God's statutes, law, commandments, testimonies, ways, word, ordinances, and precepts. The author states how strongly he desires to be taught God's statutes, to understand His law, to walk in His commandments, to incline his heart to His testimonies, to be established in His word, and to long for His precepts. He desires so strongly to achieve these things because he simply recognized that God's **"ordinances are good."** (v.39) The attitude that the author possessed in regard to God's word certainly doesn't seem questionable. But what about our attitude towards God's Word? Can we say that it is on the same level as the 119th Psalm's author?
- Sure it is easy for us to say that we feel the same way as the author, but can it be said of us that we truly desire to be taught of God's statutes? Can we say that we truly want to understand His law and walk in His commandments? If this can be said about us, then I would be confident in saying that we will be a people who want to spend as much time in God's Word as possible. While recognizing the importance of being in God's Word on a consistent basis, this local church has the tradition of creating a daily Bible Reading schedule that corresponds with our annual theme to give our church members another tool to utilize in our efforts to be in God's Word on a continual basis.
- This year's Daily Bible Reading schedule will take us through the New Testament Letters that were written to those disciples who lived within the first century. With these letters having been written so long ago to people that we are so far removed from, it can sometimes be difficult for us to see the importance in giving our time to reading this section of God's Word. However, let me suggest to you that we can be overwhelmingly benefitted from a year long consideration of just this section of God's Word, and this evening I would like to give you four reasons why we ought to give effort to read these NT Letters throughout 2019.

4 Reasons To Read The New Testament Letters In 2019

1. They are inspired by God.

1. Thankfully, the point of origin for these letters (and the Bible as a whole) hasn't been left up to our own speculation, but God has spoken through His inspired writers to make sure that men are aware that these writings are from His mind and not the mind of men.
 - a) *"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**" (II Peter 1:20,21)*
 - b) *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, **not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit**, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." (I Corinthians 2:12,13)*
 - c) *"For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, **you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God** which also performs its work in you who believe." (I Thessalonians 2:13)*
 - d) *"**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." (II Peter 1:20,21)*

2. All of these texts simply go to show that the authors and the recipients of the letters believed that God was behind everything that had been written, and this was completely and totally to their benefit because we must recognize man's propensity to really mess things up when we begin to think that we know what is good or best for us. Jeremiah could look back at Israel's history and fully realize *"that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps."* (**Jeremiah 10:23**) The writer of Proverbs had so little faith in the ability of man to direct his own steps that two times he wrote, *"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* (**Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25**)
3. With this being the modus operandi (MO) or habits of men, it is key for us to understand that we need help! We need help from someone who knows better than we know if we are wanting to truly be successful in this life. If all of us are included in the group of men who don't know what we are doing, then we must look to someone who is greater than we are. Who is that? It must be God! If we recognize Him as being greater than we are, then we must be willing to acknowledge rightfully that God knows what is best for us. He spoke through Isaiah and said as much in **Isaiah 55:8,9**. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.'"* God's high thoughts and high ways are contained all throughout Scripture, and that is just as true when it comes to the New Testament Letters. They are great and beneficial to read if for no other reason than the fact that they are words that are inspired by God.
2. Many were written by the Apostles.
 1. God inspired them to be written, but God himself did not physically carry out the writing of these letters. This means that some one had to literally write what was delivered to the first century disciples, and those men who were behind the vast majority of the New Testament Letters were handpicked Apostles of Jesus Christ. This should be something we see as significant because it shows that God's inspired writings could be traced back to individuals who played a key role in the establishment of the church. The authors of these letters weren't just random individuals, but they were men who were right in the heart of what was taking place within Christianity.
 2. Not only were they right in the middle of everything that was going on which in and of itself would have greatly aided them in what they wrote, but it is important to, again, emphasize that these men were not left on their own to write what they wrote. They were given the Holy Spirit as a means by which they would write exactly what needed to be written. *"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with me from the beginning."* (**John 15:26,27**) This text actually shows us two important reasons why we should care what the Apostles had to say.
 - a) Firstly, Jesus speaks to the fact that the Spirit would come to support the Apostles in their work. This Spirit of truth would come and fill them with the knowledge necessary to lead the church. Peter puts it this way in **II Peter 3:3,4**, *"seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is the world by lust."* All things concerning life, godliness, and God's great promises were first given to the Apostles and then those things were passed on to us so that we too might come to have the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.
 - b) Secondly, These were the men that had been with Jesus from the beginning! Who better to look to for teachings concerning Jesus than those who had been with Him during nearly the entirety of His ministry? The Apostles themselves even recognized that they had been with

Jesus for a long time and that it should have counted for something for them. In **Matthew 19:16-26**, Jesus is addressing the rich young ruler and making the point that only those who are willing to give up everything for Jesus. Peter takes what Jesus says and asked what then the Apostles would receive since they had left everything to follow after Jesus. Jesus's reply is that they would have the honor of being the ones that would judge or lead the twelve tribes of Israel, which Jesus uses to describe the church He would come to establish through His sacrifice and resurrection. (**Matthew 19:27,28**) These men had experiences that other people simply could not boast of, and along with the aid of the Holy Spirit they were led to be able to write things that one else could write about. Their writings would be able to lead those who read to the same knowledge they themselves had.

3. They were not designated for just one church's consumption & benefit.

1. The specific nature and subject matter of some of the NT Letters might lead us to think that they simply don't have that much practical value to us. Yes, there are some Letters that do seem to be written to a very specific audience about very specific reasons and situations. Paul's Letters to the Corinthians come to my mind very quickly because in the very beginning of the letter Paul names specific people (those of Chloe's house) and a specific problem (divisions among the disciples). I also think about Paul's letter to Philemon concerning his slave Onesimus, and even his letters to Timothy and Titus that focused so much on the work of preachers and evangelists. These letters were written to specific people for specific reasons.
 2. However, there were other Letters that seem to have a much wider audience such as James which is addressed to *"the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad."* (**James 1:1**) The same type of greeting is also found in **I Peter 1:1**, *"To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatian, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen..."* **II Peter 2:1** also has a very generic opening. *"To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours..."* Then there is the text of **Colossians 4:16** which clearly states that Paul's letters were shared between churches. *"When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea."*
 3. Though some of these Letters might have been written to specific people for specific reasons, there were other times when they had a much larger general audience, and they even shared letters at times! All of this simply goes to emphasize in my mind the truth of **II Timothy 3:16,17** where Paul plainly states that *"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."* All of God's writings are useful to help all disciples, even those who are living nearly 2,000 years removed, in our efforts to walk with God.
4. They present to us real life issues faced by disciples and God's solutions to those issues.
1. One of the ways that they help us is by showing us how God would have us respond and react to different situations that we might find ourselves in. This is one of the greatest benefits of being diligent in reading and coming to know the NT Letters: They give us real life people, with real life problems, and real life solutions dictated by God. While there are obviously some situations that we simply aren't likely to deal with such as misuses of miraculous gifts and issues surrounding the Law of Moses, the vast majority of what we find in the NT Letters can and does happen still today.
 2. Consider all of these different situations that happen to day that were found within the NT Letters:
 - a) It is very possible for people coming from different ethic and cultural backgrounds to find themselves as fellow members of the same local congregation. How are they supposed to work together having come from such different place? The Letter to the Romans has answers for that.
 - b) It is very possible for a local congregation to be caught up in divisions that results in all sorts of other ungodly actions and situations. How can such circumstance be overcome? The Letters to the Corinthians has answers for that.

- c) What is Jesus's church all about? What are the foundational principles that it is to be built upon? The Letter to the Ephesians has answers to that.
 - d) How is the church to be organized and operated, and what role do preachers have in the organizing of local churches? The Letters to Timothy and Titus have good answers to those questions!
 - e) How are disciples to respond to opposition and persecutions from others? There are many of the NT Letters, specifically the Thessalonian letters and John's Revelation, that address that question because there was often great opposition to Christianity during the first century.
3. More examples could be specifically pointed out, but I think these are enough to show that though there are many years that separate us from the writing of these NT Letters, many of the same issues and problems faced by those disciples are still faced today. Therefore, it must be acknowledged and accepted that God's Word is true when it tells us that it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training. The words that have been preserved for us are so valuable, and we would certainly do well to give careful and diligent attention to the reading and consideration of this particular section of Scripture this year in 2019.

I hope that each of you have gotten your hands on a Daily Bible Reading schedule for this year. I think the most we read in any given week is four chapters, so there is definitely no overloading of Scripture that you'll feel bogged down with. My hope is that each of us will set aside some time during each day to open up God's Word, read, and consider what is found within these New Testament Letters, and if you have any questions let's sit down and talk about those, or if you have a particular section that you'd like to hear a lesson on, I'd be happy to do my best with those requests. I hope you are excited about our reading for this year, and I hope these considerations have shown each of us just how valuable time spent in these Scriptures will be. May God be with us and bless us as we spend time together in His Word through this year.