

Putting Truth to Work

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- [0 : 00] Good morning. Let me say a couple things before we get to the task at hand, which is the Lord's word.
- It is a great privilege to be with this church in particular. You have had a journey since COVID began. We've all been on our own journey with that.
- Each church has had to navigate it, but you've lost your facility and needed to bounce around. And the flexibility that you have shown and your faithfulness to this body is just demonstrated by the number of people that are in front of me today.
- And I count it an unplanned privilege to shut down your time here at this community center and send you back to the location I know that you started. Let's give our attention, if we could, for the next bit of time to the word of the Lord.
- Would you turn in your Bibles, please, to Psalm 119. I'll be reading the whole thing.
- [1 : 08] No, I won't. I won't. It's a very long psalm. We're going to be looking at just one stanza of this very long psalm, verses 9 through 16. But before we get there, I want to give you a heads up of what this sermon is looking to accomplish.
- Every sermon, after it exposit a text and helps you understand what's being said to the original audience, every sermon tends to try to then make it applicable to help you understand the claim it makes on your life through application.
- And, of course, this sermon will do that. But it's designed to do even more than that. By teaching this passage in the way I'm teaching it, the hope is that you'll do more than just learn Psalm 119, verses 9 through 16.
- The hope is that you'll learn, to an even greater degree, how to apply the Bible. How to take any passage and ask it questions so that it has a claim on your life, so that you understand the difference it's supposed to make in your life.
- And so I've titled this sermon, Putting Truth to Work. And we're going to demonstrate that coming out of Psalm 119. Now, I want you to picture a kitchen sponge right next to the sink.
- [2 : 27] Now, maybe you're the kind of people that use the yellow sponge with the green scrubby on the back. Maybe yours is blue with a darker blue scrubby on the back.
- Maybe you don't have a scrubby. I think those people still exist somewhere. But whatever comes to mind when you think of your kitchen sponge, just picture it sitting there.
- There's no water around it. By all appearances, the sponge is dry. And so you go and you pick it up and you squeeze it over your sink and water comes pouring out of the sponge.
- Okay, you with me on the picture? All right. That sponge laying there next to the sink, we're going to call that professed faith.
- It's the faith that you profess. This will all make sense, trust me, in about 65 seconds. Professed faith. It's the faith that we say we believe. It's what we study.
- [3 : 29] It's how we would answer a theological exam. Then you take it and you squeeze it over your sink. And let's call that water that comes out functional faith.

It's what happens in our life when heat gets applied. It's what happens when things don't go according to plan. Functional faith is the faith that we live out of when we ourselves are squeezed.

Professed faith is real. But we never live out of everything we say we believe. We only live out of what we truly believe.

That's what our faith functions out of. That's what we see in our lives when we are squeezed. And in each of our lives, there's a gap, isn't there?

Between what we know about God and what we live really believing about God. There's a difference in how we would answer a question on a test and how we respond when we're squeezed.

[4 : 47] And that gap is where your besetting sins lie. That gap is where doubts live. That gap is where you're vulnerable to attack and temptation.

And the hope this morning is to give you a roadmap on how to close that gap. How to take what you really in your heart of hearts believe to be true and help it take one step closer to what you know the Bible says is true.

Okay, the entire message is designed to help close that gap and put truth to work. And we're going to do that out of Psalm 119.

Let's read that passage together. This is God's holy and authoritative word. How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you. Let me not wander from your commandments. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

[6 : 01] Blessed are you, O Lord. Teach me your statutes. With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes.

I will not forget your word. Let's pray. Father, as we come now to sitting under and applying your word, Lord, we ask for the help of your spirit to open our ears and our minds, to overcome even the weaknesses of my preaching, and that your spirit would take your truth and apply it personally and specifically in each of our hearts.

Change us because we've sat under your word this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. Now if you come to a passage like this, let's say, in your own devotions, it's easy to turn this into a checklist.

Keep my way pure. How am I doing? I'm staying pretty clean. Check. Store up God's word. Work on my Bible memory. Check. We apply ourselves to growth, which is good, but we often do it in a strength that we generate, in a to-do way of doing it.

[7 : 37] And we do it sometimes in the wrong power and for the wrong reasons. And in this passage, we are called to something we will never fully attain, this side of heaven.

And what is it? We will never fully attain it, perfectly live that out. We are finite creatures.

And in our own strength, we are weak and we are frail and we are vulnerable to temptation. And even as we grow in purity, which each of us must do, as we follow Christ, we each must walk in purity as we can.

And we fall woefully short of the required standard. And here's the truth, and it's good news. Only one has kept his way perfectly pure.

Only one has stored God's word in his heart that he might not sin. Only one has sought God with his whole heart.

[8 : 45] And his name is Jesus. And while we're called to follow his example and to walk according to his ways, we do not attain purity by discipline and obedience alone.

In fact, the way to break the power of sin in our lives is to entrust ourselves to his righteousness, is to take all of our hope and lay it on Jesus.

He lived a life that was free from sin and was full of righteousness. And in his immeasurable love and God's immeasurable wisdom, God covers us in the righteousness that Jesus earned.

And he's laid upon Jesus the penalty and judgment we have earned. 2 Corinthians 5 says it very plainly.

For our sake, God made Jesus to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[10 : 03] This is good news for our functional faith. Because you don't dig yourself out of the pit. In God's mercy, he pulls us out of the pit.

And he puts us on a rock. Firm footing. When we entrust ourselves to him, God looks at us not as failures who have to get their acts together, but as righteous children of God in whom is all his delight.

In whom he pours his grace and his mercy. For our functional faith, we don't have to dig ourselves out of a hole to have hope. No, our functional faith begins when we truly believe this.

Our functional faith begins on a rock. Out of the muck and out of the mire. We don't earn God's favor by applying this.

We already have God's favor because of Jesus. And we run after purity, not because we want to be free, but because God has already freed us from the power of sin.

[11 : 20] And so as you're thinking about whatever sin came to mind when I talked about the gap, where your besetting sins lie, or where your temptations or doubts lie, whatever came to mind, as we approach that very topic, and as you see this call on how to address your functional faith, we start with victory.

So as you hear this, there is no discouragement to be had. There is no huge mountain to climb. No, because of God's mercy, he not only gives us his righteousness, but in this fight he gives us his help.

And we know, because the scriptures say it, you would answer it on a theological test, that we can do all things in Christ who strengthens us.

That's the hope we can bring to dealing with a faith that doesn't rise to what we know the Bible says. We can bring hope to it. And so Lord, we can say, squeeze us.

Let us see what we're made of. And when I see something that falls short of your promises, remind me of Jesus. Remind me of Christ. Remind me of hope and of the help you provide when I confess, when I repent.

[12 : 46] And what happens is our functional faith rises. All right, that's just all the introduction. Are you with me? Let's jump into the first point.

Relying on God's word. There's a premise in this passage that if we don't buy it up front, we're going to end up applying the rest of this passage really unhelpfully.

And the premise is this, that we can keep our way pure if we live according to God's word. It says it very plainly in verse nine.

Take a look. How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. So let me ask you a couple questions to see if you buy into this premise functionally.

We know the Bible says it. I just read it to you. So that's our professed faith. But do we really believe it? Let me ask you a couple questions. In your biggest areas of temptations, what role does God's word play?

[13 : 57] When you're facing hardship and someone shares the word of God with you, are you typically resistant to that or receptive to that?

When you're walking through a trial, do you find that you spend less time in God's word or more time in God's word? If we genuinely functionally believe that it's God's word living according to that that keeps our way pure, in trial we will double down in our time in the word.

We will invest further because we need the instruction. We need the reminders. We need the strength that comes from his authoritative word.

We need to be so sure of what God says in his word that we will stake all we have and all we are on what he says. All right, let me illustrate this.

Let's imagine that I'm friends with a structural engineer. I know this person to be excellent, high integrity, and I've seen her work before and she does excellent work.

[15 : 12] Okay? I could look closely at the design and the blueprints of a bridge that's being built and I could be convinced she has covered every detail.

I could stand there and watch the construction team put the bridge together and make sure that they don't cut corners or skip details. I could walk with her as she examines the finished product and watch her sign off on it that it's ready to bear the weight.

And then I can turn and tell you that is a bridge that can hold up your weight. Go ahead and walk across it. And I haven't yet expressed an ounce of functional faith.

That's all professed faith. When do I express functional faith? When I step on it. Now, I'm so confident in her work that I'm entrusting myself to it.

This needs to be our relationship with the promises of God. Not that we just learn them, not that we can teach them, not that we can sing songs about them or tell them to others.

[16 : 24] Yes, all of that, but not just that. We need to be so certain of God's promises that we're gonna step out onto them. And if I fall, it'll be because God failed, not because I failed to trust him.

When we're able to do that over and over again, our functional faith rises to the faith that we profess and we experience the power and the care and the ministry that comes by trusting in God.

Our goal as Christians, as we rely on God's word, is not to trust what we see, but to trust the one who speaks his promises, to know the character of God so thoroughly that when all of the signs around us betray what we know, we step anyway because God said it.

Lord, I have no idea what you're doing. Nothing that's happened in the last weeks reflects how I understand love. But you tell me you love me and you tell me you're going to be there for me.

So I'm not gonna turn from you. I'm gonna step to you because anywhere I turn does not have the words of life. Only Jesus does. That's what relying on God's word looks like.

[17 : 53] That we entrust all we are to what he says and we take him at his word. So if that's what relying on God's word looks like, what does it look like to apply God's word?

That's the second point we'll spend most of the time looking at the rest of this passage of applying God's word. About eight years ago now, I was playing floor hockey with all the pastors that I serve with.

I serve with 10 other guys now. It was probably 12 or 13 at that point before we planted a couple churches. And we were on a team retreat and during that retreat, we always do something athletic that reminds all of us how old we are.

And floor hockey was the punishment of the day. So we're playing floor hockey and we don't use like full sticks because we'd kill one another. So we use these little plastic kid sticks.

Right? It's actually, we would never allow video out of this. No one would follow us at church. But, so we're running around with these sticks bent over for like an hour and I throw my back out.

[19 : 03] Right? Two days later, I'm at my chiropractor, a good friend, and he pays me the most unkind compliment. Here's what he says to me. Rob, your back muscles are so strong.

It's a good start. They are overcoming your weak abs. And then he charged me for the visit is what happened.

The point there is that I have a part of my body that's overdeveloped or strengthened and a part of my body that's underdeveloped.

And that part that's underdeveloped causes my whole body to suffer. This is what happens in our spiritual lives. We have some areas we love.

Some areas that are easy for us to believe. Some promises of God we'd never doubt. We step out on the bridge. We do a dance on the bridge. But there are other areas we just don't trust him. We won't entrust ourselves to him.

[20 : 10] And those weak areas are where we get attacked. So what do we need to do? What do I need to do to fix that problem of my back overcoming my weak abs?

I need to first of all stop playing floor hockey with tiny sticks. But after that I need to strengthen the weak area so that my body can be balanced and healthy.

We need to strengthen the weak areas of our lives of our spiritual lives so that our whole soul can be balanced and strengthened. And this passage gives us seven areas we can examine.

The first one is treasuring God's word. Take a look at verse 10. With my whole heart I seek you. Let me not wander from your commandments.

Let's just accept the truth of this. We treasure what is most important to us. It's not necessarily objectively the greatest thing.

[21 : 14] It's just subjective in our hearts. What matters most to us is what we treasure. And it's not necessarily the most monetary you know the highest monetary value. If you've had a house fire just imagine a house fire you're not running and grabbing the sofa and the TV.

You're not running to get the piano out of the house. You're running to get the kids and things like photographs. Hopefully in that order not the photographs first.

Get the kids safe and then you can get the other things. We treasure what matters most to us. Jesus' relationship with God's word was very clear.

He treasured the word of God and always did the will of the Father. David's relationship with the word of God was very clear. When he treasured God's word he was victorious.

He walked in strength. Even when chased by Saul he brought honor to God. When he failed to entrust himself to God's word when he ceased to treasure it he falls into sin.

[22 : 31] Growing knowing in how you treasure God's word will strengthen you from the inside out. Okay the first area we need to examine is how are we doing at treasuring the word of God.

Next we memorize God's word. Take a look at verse 11. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Many times we don't obey because we don't know what God has to say on the matter.

Often times conviction comes not as we're considering a sin but in the aftermath of a sin. But if God's word is stored in our hearts it's always there to instruct us.

And if we believe that the way we keep our way pure is by guarding it according to his word and that word is in our arsenal for whatever battle we would face each day then we don't live in ignorance.

We don't live below what he's called us to. We can rise to what he's called us to because we know what his will is. We know what he says. And when we talk about Bible memory some will say okay I'm in I get it I'm going to start memorizing my Bible and you start by memorizing Psalm 119 in its entirety or the book of Philippians or the book of Romans.

[24 : 02] And those are fine things to do I don't want to demean that. I'm suggesting however a starting place be a little more strategic than that. Remember the gap between our professed faith and our functional faith.

Whatever temptations or sins are living there memorize passages of the scriptures that address those things. don't start with large books of the Bible.

Be surgical in how you equip your heart to engage battle. And then as you see strength grow as you grow in holiness and you see the value of God's word applied in specific areas then we can go to larger chapters or books of the Bible.

It's a wonderful exercise spiritual discipline but be strategic first. Address those areas in the gap and watch it close. Next we study God's word.

Look at verse 12. Blessed are you oh Lord teach me your statutes. A disciple of Jesus infers that we are not only following but learning from.

[25 : 14] That's what disciple is. Someone who is learning from a teacher. And so we need to be growing in our knowledge and understanding of God's word. That means we read God's word.

When we read it we tear it apart. We try to understand the argument that's being made. We look at the passages before and after what we're studying to understand the context of it. We read books about God's word so that we can understand from people who are ahead of us in our study what do they say that means and we consider that in light of God's word.

God's word. This is why there are things like Bible studies biblical counseling and fellowship. It's why in small groups I recommend that everybody in the small group bring a Bible and open it before the discussion starts with the expectation at some point we're going to be in this thing.

We study God's word and as we grow in our knowledge we understand the will of the Lord much better. next we share God's word.

Look at verse 13. With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. Listen following the Lord is very difficult if you are not actively sharing with others sharing with the lost or your co-workers fellow students neighbors friends family members now why is that?

[26 : 47] What happens when you evangelize is you start to get arguments back about why what you're saying may be untrue. Yeah but what about this?

And what about doesn't the Bible say this? And what about this contradiction in the Bible? And what that does to a disciple of Christ is as we share with God's word we may get questions we don't know answers to.

And we hate that feeling and we be embarrassed by that and so we don't share. But if you do share and you get a question you don't know the answer to I have a script for you.

You ready? That is a great question. I don't know. Let me find someone who does and I will get back to you. And now you become the student and you go and you learn and you realize I didn't really love that feeling of not knowing so I want to make sure I know this thing better so that as I'm sharing I'm more equipped to give a reason for the hope that lives within me.

And being a sharer of the gospel forces you by default to become a knower of God's word. If we don't share we isolate and we only actually share eternal things with people who are safe to us with people that probably already agree with all of the things you think and we don't get pressed deeper and broader in the word of God.

[28 : 19] Next we love God's word above all else. Verse 14 In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. Now this parallels treasuring God's word very carefully but the way this is worded begs this question what do you love more than God's word?

Is it your freedom? Your liberties? And your concern if you just put God's word first you'd have to stop this or start that.

I know the temptation for me is that I love peace particularly peace in my home. It doesn't mean the noise of a family it's the conflict that I really despise.

I love peace between my kids and when you have six there's a lot of ways for them to trip up and be in increased conflict. Now that sounds like a fine thing to love right?

Shouldn't everybody love peace between their kids? Rob aren't you so admirable? No I can when peace is shaken my temptation is to just override it with loud calls to peace.

[29 : 40] There was a time I could raise my voice above the rest of my kids. Some of the kids in the military are louder than me now they can get their voice up there. That's my temptation and in my home I've got to be aware I need to love God more than I love peace.

I mean God loves peace between my kids but he doesn't want me to sin to get it. I need to love God actively moment by moment more than I love the other valid things that I love.

So consider what is it that you're tempted to put above the word of God and remember if you live according to that you'll not keep your way pure. We need to live according to God's word and the best way to love this thing is to do it under the word of God and not aside or above the word of God.

Number six meditate on God's word. Look at verse 15 I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways.

Now Christian meditation is a lost art and a lot of Christians don't like using the word now because it conjures up eastern religion it conjures up visions of of us all doing yoga together and let me just suggest that's not the historic use of the word and it's not what's intended in the scriptures when that word is used.

[31 : 10] Meditation is dwelling on a word or a passage or a chapter just dwelling there asking it questions until it illuminates something in your soul until it illuminates something in your mind.

it's taking a passage and asking perhaps some of these questions what claim is this making on my life right now? If I were to apply this passage what would need to change in my perspective?

What words are the key words in this verse and why is this author using those words and not other words? like these kinds of things you'll find as you dwell and you meditate on this it slows us down and it allows us to reflect one of the enemies of meditation is the Bible reading plan to read it in a year I'm for you doing that I'm not against it I'm suggesting though that that should probably be outside of your quiet time as additional reading allow time in your quiet time to slow down to not finish the list allow God to say hey pause here for a minute I want to do some business with you in this verse but God I've got three other chapters to get to yeah you don't want to put God on hold if he wants to speak you want to let him in and you want to slow down and you want to hear what the spirit of God has to say to you and then lastly verse 16 we remember what we know it says

I will delight in your statutes I will not forget your word and I do believe this is the Achilles heel in Christian living we forget what we know you know I tried to sit down one time and add up the number of sermons I've sat under and listened to the amount of truth that I gave up by the way the amount of truth that God in his kindness has revealed to me think about that in your own life how many sermons have you sat under and how much of that can you draw to mind right now we forget so much and one of the reasons is we don't purpose to remember we listen attentively we're grateful for the word we may be moved but in two weeks you probably won't remember the sponge right you won't remember perhaps some of the passages that have been shared we forget and here the psalmist says

I will not forget your word and so let me just suggest a way or two you can be a rememberer of God's word if you are not typically a note taker let me encourage you to take notes when you do that you not only create a record of what you've been taught you're engaging a different part of your brain than you do when you're listening and now there's two ways that you're storing things in your heart through your ears and through your writing okay if you are a note taker let me encourage the habit of revisiting the notes once a month quarterly go back through what you've learned so far make it an annual habit to skim through all the notes you've taken that year as you come up on New Year's Eve celebrate the end of a year by worshiping God and thanking him for all he's taught you that year you'll remember more and you'll see you fall in line with the psalmist now

[35 : 02] I'm coming to an end I promise but I want to pull all of this together and I want to illustrate for you what it could look like what would it look like if we did all these verses at once if we just lived according to Psalm 119 verses 9 to 16 so in your life I want you to get specific let's say you're trying to overcome an area of sin and you identified that sin as pride I want to suggest to you you're not yet done because pride is the root of all sin right it's really too broad to specifically repent of I mean don't entertain it you want to confess your pride but try to get more specific maybe it's anger maybe it's arrogance maybe it's envy something more specific we're going to come up with an example here that I want to walk you through let's say you struggle with unforgiveness toward a friend that's specific it's about a specific person of a specific relationship and a specific sin they hurt you in significant ways and you can't seem to forgive and in your regular daily quiet time which you still have you come across

Colossians 3 13 it says this bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive and the Spirit slows you down there and you're like ooh God doesn't want me to go on to the next verse just yet and so you read it again and you look for a way out you're hoping there's some except in your case clause right you keep looking and you're like surely this can't mean that I'm supposed to forgive this person and you realize there's no escape clause there's no hatch for you to pop out of that that command and you just say honestly to the Lord I can't I can't forgive and this is right where many of us stop we see the command we don't believe we can obey and we live in opposition to

God's word and God's desire for us we fail to move toward obedience because we don't believe we can do it and we're right left to ourselves we cannot do it but God can through us how how does he do that first we look in the verse for help and it doesn't say forgive as much as you are able if you were able you would have done it already no the verse says as the Lord has forgiven you and we ask that phrase some questions how has the Lord forgiven me and we realize it is completely it is sacrificially it is lovingly and okay that is clear to us but maybe that is just Paul to the Colossian church is this anywhere else in the

Bible that we are supposed to forgive as we are forgiven and we look at a cross reference that superscript italicized letters in your Bible and we let it take us to Mark 17 sorry to Mark there is no Mark 17 it says 11 I don't know why I said 17 to Mark 11 verse 25 listen this is Jesus talking and whenever you stand praying forgive and if you have anything against anyone so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses and you see that doesn't give you a lot of new information because it's kind of the same thing Paul said but it's a different author and it's a different speaker and it's a different context so God must mean this thing and you're saying I can't do it Lord holds even less weight because you see God repeated himself when God repeats himself we pay special attention and so our love for God is stirred and it overcomes our weakness to forgive and we just say Lord

I need more help and we go to our concordances which for many of us are in the back of our Bibles and we look up the word forgive and as we do that we come across Romans 4 blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin and we freeze why do we freeze there because that causes us to remember all of the things God could hold against us but in his love he forgives and it hits us like a ton of bricks that all of this help we're getting from the Bible is the love of God while I'm actively sinning against him by not forgiving what unbelievable mercy we receive from God how could we receive such grace and not in turn extend that to others how did we arrive at this illumination of what we're actually doing how did we arrive at such gratitude for God we guarded our heart according to his word we simply meditated and studied we treasured we followed

[41 : 19] Psalm 119 verses 9 through 16 and it changed us but at that very moment we've come to this enlightened place of professed faith now we take what God just taught us and we step out on it and we go and we forgive now we've exercised the very thing God has shown us to be true and our functional faith ratchets up that's just one example in one situation from one passage that can really help us to grow imagine if we treated the whole book that way what strength and deliverance and riches are available to us and we remind ourselves as I close that we don't so God loves us more no we grow in treasuring

God's word and living according to it because he already loves us immeasurably we come to this and abide by it because it is God's good will for those he's already loved those he's already adopted those he's already sanctified he's in the midst of changing you from one degree of glory to another so that next year you are more like Jesus than you are right now because by the grace of God you are more like Jesus now than you were last year this is God's work and he's going to finish it he's going to be faithful as you abide in it he will be faithful to bring himself glory to bring you his blessing to use you to help others walk across that bridge because you can say oh I remember when I was afraid of that bridge you watch me walk across and then you come with me this will help us close this gap amen let me pray father father your word is powerful it is personal it is living and active and we pray lord that in each of our lives in each of our trials by the precision and power of your spirit you would apply your word so that we can bring you more glory and honor by how we live lord help us in the name of Jesus amen to end before like we we have we have you ■■■■■■■■ i want of Jesus to this food you you you you you you you you you you you