

# “A Year of the Bible” // *The Whole Story* #1 // Psalm 119

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## A handful of times I’ve told you about a book called *The Year of Living Biblically*.

- The author, AJ Jacob, is not a Christian. He describes himself as a Jewish agnostic: “I’m officially Jewish, but only Jewish in the same way that Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant.”
- For an entire year this dude attempts to follow every rule of the Bible as literally as possible.
- He begins by reading the Bible cover to cover, writing down every single directive that he could find... and then tried to live them out for a year. While living in Manhattan. *The Year of Living Biblically*.
  - He stopped wearing clothes made of any mixed fibers
  - In accordance with Levitical law, he stopped having the edges of his beard, and ends up with this massive beard that makes him look like the lead singer for ZZ Top.
  - He refuses to shake hands with any woman he thinks might be ceremonially unclean

- And (this was one of my favorites), he tries to fling tiny pebbles at people without them noticing in order to stone adulterers.

He did this for a **whole year**. He said it made for a **great book** but almost destroyed his marriage. His wife told him if he didn’t cut it out she was doing to leave him.<sup>1</sup>

I find a kind of **morbid amusement** with this because I think it **encapsulates** how many people approach the Bible... or what **keeps them from approaching** the Bible, rather.

They are not sure how to take it. It’s **intimidating**.

Even if you believe the Bible, you might feel about it like you do the **terms and conditions** page that comes up when Apple wants to put new software on your computer... **Page after page** of tedious mumbo-jumbo... And all you think is, *“Where’s the button where I can just ‘accept all’?”* You assume if that if there’s something in there you need to know about, someone will tell you (if there’s a clause that says—“By accepting this you give up birthrights to your two oldest children” then some nerd will find that and tweet about it.) That’s what you want to do with the Bible. I’m the nerd.

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<sup>1</sup> I heard Josh Harris originally share many of these elements of this book.

Works Consulted:

Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*

Tim Keller, “Bible”

Tim Keller, “What Is The Bible?”

James MacDonald, “Why I Believe The Bible”

James MacDonald, “Where Did The Bible Come From?”

James MacDonald, “How To Benefit From The Bible”

James MacDonald, “What Is The Bible Good For?”

Kevin DeYoung, *Quotes from Taking God at His Word*

Some of you have tried to read it and you started out really well—a New Year’s resolution—but you got **stuck in some genealogy where “Abima-shazam begets Melshizzle”** and you just fizzled out.

**Well, this year at The Summit Church, we’re going to change all that.**

This is going to be **our own year** of living biblically: We’re going to spend a year—50 sermons—going through the whole Bible. **We’re calling the series, “The Whole Story”** because that’s what we’re going to see...

- The Bible has **31,102 verses; 1663 commands;**<sup>2</sup> **40 different authors** and **3237 different characters**. There are **31 different guys** in the Bible named “Zechariah.”

Yet in all these commands and stories and personalities there is really **only ONE story** being told: it’s all about the birth of a baby. A very special baby, born in a manger. **Every character, every genealogy, every command, points to him; every story whispers his name.**

I’m not exaggerating to say that **this series** is going to completely revolutionize some of your lives.

- For some of you, you are going to **get your mind around** the big picture of the Bible for the first time. It’s all going to start making sense.
  - And I will tell you that there is **nothing better for your marriage**, your self-understanding, your sense of self-worth and purpose in your life than knowing this story and your place in it.
  - Ironic: not knowing how to fix “your story,” but finding your place in his...
  - Me teaching you “10 steps to a great marriage” is not nearly as beneficial as grasping the 10,000 steps Jesus took toward you...

- If you are **new to Christianity**, or curious about it, I can think of nothing more beneficial for you than this.

I want to invite you to really take this seriously, and we have 3 resources for you:

- Most important: JSB:
  - Read one story a week; you’ll track right along with me.
  - **My family is doing this...**
  - PARENTS: get this.
  - Even adults! Someone asked me: best book for getting mind around the whole Bible—I said this book.
- Secondly, *we’ve developed TWO Bible reading plans for you to choose from this year.*
  - **You say, “Why two?”** Think of them as JV and Varsity.
  - **The JV is what we call the Whole Story plan**, it will be just a chapter or 2 a day and follows closely with the weekend messages
  - **Varsity is the Every Verse plan**, in which you will read every word in the Bible this year. It was also handed out this weekend to you.
- **There’s no shame in the JV**, but here’s some motivation to go for the Varsity
  - It takes less than 10 minutes a day to read the whole Bible in a year. (Average American reads 225 words/minute; 775K words in Bible = 10 min a day)
    - If you gave it the same amount of time you do TV you could do it in a month.
  - **Not a reader?** Get it on audio! All on Summitrdu.com.
- **Let me tell why this will absolutely** change your life: because dwelling on the Bible is the single greatest thing you can do to **invigorate your faith.**

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<sup>2</sup> **613** in the OT and **1050** in the New

- **Developing faith is less like building a house** where you add one brick at a time... and more like getting in shape.
- Getting in shape is about your body steadily getting stronger over a lifetime. You don't just work out once for all and then you're done... you spend a lifetime working out and developing those muscles.
- **And one of the keys, they say, to getting in shape, is eating right.**
  - (I've heard it said that being in **shape is only 20%** what you do and 80%...
  - **At the gym I go to they are always encouraging me** to eat super foods—things with high protein, omega 3.
    - I'm always trying to tell my coach at the gym that the reason I eat so many fried foods is that the oil lubricates your system and that makes the food go through more smoothly... that's good, just like a car.
  - **He hasn't added it to the nutrition manual** yet, but I think I'm winning him over.
- Scripture **is, and has always been, the super food of faith.** Knowing it doesn't equal faith, but it gives you the capacities for faith.

**I don't make many guarantees, but if you do this—guaranteed—** next year this time you will not be in the same spiritual place as you are this year.

## PSALM 119

Today, we're going to spend some time on the greatest love poem ever written... **PSALM 119.**

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 119 is longer than 31 books of the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> Delight is used 10x, with many other equivalents as well.

**Psalm 119** is the longest chapter in the Bible; longer than almost half of the other books of the Bible!<sup>3</sup>

It is a love poem about the Bible itself.

We **don't know whom the author** of this poem is (our best guess is Ezra), but whoever it is, is just enraptured by the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

**They write the poem in a very creative way:**

- **22 stanzas**, each one corresponding to one letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which has 22 letters) and each of the 8 verses in each stanza starts with that letter.
- **One tradition** says that this Psalm was written by David to teach Solomon the alphabet

(I **don't know about that**, but I hope you **see it is significant that the longest love poem** in the Bible is not about marriage or children or mountains and sunsets, but about the Bible:<sup>5</sup> the greatest beauty in the world is the Bible.)

Jewish people have used this Psalm for years as part of their New Year's celebration (Rosh Hashanah), so how appropriate to open our year with it!

**Charles Spurgeon** said that every preacher should memorize the whole thing.

- **Blaise Pascal** and **William Wilberforce** did.
- **I won't tell you if I have done that or not**, but you guys know **how humble I am** and that I would never want to show off if I had memorized it... so **I'll just act like I am reading a few verses** even

<sup>5</sup> "Psalm 119 is the explosion of praise made possible by an orthodox and evangelical doctrine of Scripture." DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, 10, 14

though you know I'm really quoting it all from memory, and then I'll give you 4.5 brief reflections on them.

[9] How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. [11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

(14) I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. [23] Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

[41] Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; [42] then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word.

72 The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

[89] Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. 91 Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.

[99] I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. [100] I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

[105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

[109] I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.

[111] Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

116 Sustain me, my God, according to your promise, and I will live;

133 Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

[176] I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

## 1. The Bible is revelation from God

- Throughout the Psalm, the author refers to Scripture as “testimonies” of God, “statutes,” “law,” “precepts,” “rules,” “commandments,” and “word” from God.
- **Nowhere in Scripture is Scripture talked about** as enlightened human thoughts about God... it is God’s revelation to us.
- And that’s one of the **most important things to learn** about the Bible.
- Our culture relegates this book as one collection of enlightened thoughts about God, and every religion has it’s own contribution.
  - **Most people see religion like the** story of the blind man and elephant parable
- As humbly but as direct as I can... that’s **not what the writer of this Psalm, or Jesus, believed about the Bible**. Jesus believed that when the authors of the Bible wrote, they spoke the very voice of God.
  - **In Mark 12, for example**, Jesus quoted from a passage in the Old Testament clearly written by David, but he doesn’t even mention David; instead, he says, “God said...” and then quotes David.<sup>6</sup>
- You say, “But **how can something written by a fallible human** be the word of God?”

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<sup>6</sup> Quoting Psalm 110:1–5. See also Matthew 22:31, quoting Exodus 3:6. Cf. Acts 4:25; Heb 3:7; 2 Tim 3:16.

- **Theologians compare it to the virgin birth of Jesus:** Jesus was both **human and divine**. The human side of Jesus meant that Jesus was limited in his power: he didn't fly everywhere; his knowledge on some things was limited; but he was also 100% divine, which meant that he was 100% free of error and sin.
- **He was 100% man and 100% God.**
- The same is true of the Word of God: it is 100% human, written by fallible human beings; but it is also 100% divine, which means absolutely perfect and free from error.
- It's popular today to say, "**Well, I believe in Jesus**, but not all the stuff written in the Bible."
  - **If you say that, you don't really believe in Jesus.**
- Jesus saw himself as the explainer and fulfiller of Scripture; **never it's corrector.**<sup>7</sup>
  - He said that **sooner would heaven and earth pass away** than one syllable of the Bible become untrue.<sup>8</sup>

**Now, of course, you have to learn how to interpret the Bible**—to know when the Bible is speaking metaphorically; which laws the Bible says don't apply to us anymore; and we'll get into that.

*But for now, I want you to see that Jesus thought of this book as perfect. For it to be wrong would be like saying that God was wrong...*

The writer of this Psalm says: **Psalm 119:89, "Forever your word is established in the heavens."** It's in heaven; it is established.

- The Bible a word that comes down from above, not a consensus of wisdom that rises up from below.

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout his ministry he refers to the historical Adam and Eve; to Noah, Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Elijah and Elisha, Naaman, Zechariah, Jonah, and a bunch more, without ever questioning a

**Here's why I belabor this: You have to decide if that is true or not.**  
Most important question about the Bible!

You have to decide if the Bible actually was what Jesus and the Apostles and prophets said it was.

- **If it is**, you have to accept it, all of it, as the Word of God, and not pick and set yourself up as the judge of what is right and wrong.
- **If, on the other hand, this is just a collection of human ideas** about God, then have at it! Sift and choose what you find most helpful.
- **You say**, "But I don't really know, J.D." Then come this year, and listen, and decide for yourself.

## 2. The Bible is life-giving law

- **The word "law" that the Psalmist uses throughout the Psalm (as in vs. 72)** means straight edge, like something you'd use to measure a piece of cloth or construct a building.
  - If you **don't have a measurement** for those things, you end up with chaos. Imagine if everyone could redefine "inch" or "pound."
  - That might come in handy sometimes... "No, officer, I was only going 40 miles per hour. My miles are just 3x longer than yours." But mostly it would be bad.
- **God's law is the straight edge by which we measure all things** in life... what is good, bad, right and wrong.
- **Many of us, of course, don't like the idea of anybody dictating** to us what is best for us... we'd rather follow our hearts.
  - But how do you know what in your heart is right and good?
  - EVERYONE admits that everything in our hearts isn't good...

single event, a single miracle, or a single historical claim. Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, 102.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 5:18; John 10:30.

- Let me prove it: Tim Keller tells us to imagine two young men in their late 20's, one a Viking in the 800 A. D., and the other a young professional in Downtown Durham; both are walking down the street and they have 2 impulses—one is to go back and kill that guy back at the store who just insulted my honor, the other is, “I want to have sex with another man.” The Viking culture would say, “The first impulse is a good one, act on it. Go restore your honor. But shun the 2<sup>nd</sup>.” Our culture would say the opposite. Shun the 1<sup>st</sup> impulse and don't be violent, but obey the 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- I'm **not saying those two impulses are moral equivalents**... just to say that not everything in our heart is good!
- **How are we to know which impulses are good and which are bad?** The Word of God.
- **The Bible ought to contradict you and make you mad sometimes...** It does me, and I'm a pastor!!!! It makes me mad and then I get up here and act like it doesn't...
- If it doesn't, you probably aren't reading a Word from God; you are simply projecting your own preconceived ideas about what is right or wrong and calling that God.
- You don't want a God; you want a deified version of yourself to worship and serve and a divine butler to make it all come true.

**Look at this:** Psalm 119:99, I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. [100] I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

- Let's talk about liberals for a minute. Liberals think that progressive wisdom is where it is at (better be on the right side of history); conservatives tend to think the wisdom of the past is the best.
- Is God a liberal or a conservative?

- According to these verse... When you are shaped by the word, you won't really be a liberal or conservative; you'll critique the past and the future.

[105] Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- The word gives you **wisdom about things you can't see**.
- **C.S. Lewis said that the law of God** is like being lost in the wilderness when your feet suddenly find the path.
  - Ever been lost in the woods? I have, because I have a terrible sense of direction; and I also have a conviction that I can always figure out a better way... two terrible qualities to have together. But then you find this path... the path is narrow, yes, but that **narrowness is not constraining; it is liberating**. That's what God's law is like.
  - **College and high school students:** In the word of God, you get direction that leads you through the wilderness of dating... and career selection.
- **People who are sleeping with their girlfriend...** “Will God punish us for this?” I want to say, “Why are you afraid of going sideways with the wrath of God, but not the wisdom of God?”
- *Why would you be afraid to experience the wrath of God, but not want to live by the wisdom of God?*

133 Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

- Whatever part of your life is not anchored into God's word is going to be shaky...
- **Your life is a matrix of relationships: your vocation...** whatever part is not anchored is the part the enemy attacks to bring you down...
  - I think of it like **Jenga**... My son loves that game: the look of pleasure on his face when I pull out a block and it falls... he stands up... sometimes I do it just to see his reaction.
  - Each block you remove... makes the structure weaker.

- ... **Whatever part is not anchored** into God's word becomes a spot that the **enemy can tap on** bring the whole structure down.

[23] Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes.

- **The Psalmist says:**

- Nothing shakes me, not even powerful people plotting against me...
- **Where do your thoughts go** in opposition, or tragedy?

### 3. The Bible is primarily the story of God's deeds, not ours; the record of his promise, not our duties

Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on *your wonderful deeds*... (on all my wonderful deeds, that I have done since reading your word?)

Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise. (27, 41)

- As a young boy, **I often thought of the Bible as a book of heroes** for me to emulate...
  - "Be a man after God's own heart like David; dare to be a Daniel."
- **Or I thought of as a book of rules to obey.** Rules about this and that. 1663... like whack-a-mole.
- **As I got older, a book of practical advice.**
- I hope this year you see that the Bible is not primarily any of those things.
- **The Bible is a story of someone who came to rescue us because we had broken the rules** and rejected the advice and were now so messed up that we couldn't put it all back together again.

- **But that story is so big, so captivating**, that when you finally learn it, the rest of your life starts to make sense, and you gain a motivation to live...

- Analogy I've used: major characters and minor characters: Star Wars. Biggs Darklighter? The X-wing fighter who dies shielding Luke so he can blow up Death Star. Others are just listed as X-wing fighter #6. No names, but their lives are remarkably significant because they are tied into the bigger story!

- **The story of that love is so captivating** it will redefine your life.
- **You have to stop reading the Bible as it was all about you.**
- **The message of the Bible** is not, "Here are some practical tools that can fix your life;" it is "fix your eyes on Jesus" and then everything starts to look different.
  - **That's why the genealogies and all those things** are in there... it's all about him.
  - You read it and say, "What's this got to do with me?" Maybe nothing... except that it sets up him.
- **This is not a book of duties you need to do for God;** it is the story of his love for you.
- **It's the universe's great love letter.** Have you read it *that way*?
  - (LOVE LETTERS: When V and I were dating, I was in SE Asia...) If I had found 3 boxes of them unopened and she said, "Well, I knew you loved me so I didn't read them..." How would I feel?
  - **How does God feel when you know this is his love letter**, but you've never read Habakkuk, where he describes how his love comes to you in pain?
  - **Plus, one day you'll meet Hab in heaven...**

### 4. The Bible has more value than life itself

- The Psalmist says that the word has more valuable to him than thousands of pieces of silver and gold (**vs. 72**).
  - **V. 109**, the Psalmist says, I hold my life lightly, but I cling to your word like a life raft.

- **What level of importance does the Bible have in your life?** Your family?
  - **Men, if you found out that some kind of predator** was in your neighborhood, and you let your kids go out and play with no supervision... what kind of dad would you be?
    - The Bible tells us that there is an Enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking him he may devour—his intent is to kill, steal and destroy.
  - Their only hope—your only hope—is Scripture. *The only way you can confront a lie is to know the truth.*
  - When Satan attacked Jesus, he quoted Scripture. **What will your kids come up with when Satan attacks them?** And he will. He is.
    - Jesus didn't try to outwit Satan, or lean on his character to give him the ability to withstand Satan... HE QUOTED SCRIPTURE!
    - You say, **“Well, of course Jesus knew Scripture,** he wrote it...” The **NT says** that Jesus was not born with Scripture memorized; he had to learn it, like the rest of us. In other words, **Jesus went to AWANA too...** and he finished every book and stuck around afterward for extra credit.
    - (Our family is busy, but **I don't have my kids in nearly the amount of extracurricular stuff** the average American parent has them involved in.
    - But I'm making sure they are learning the Bible.
    - And if they don't grow up knowing everything there is to know about **Taylor Swift or Lebron**, but they can talk their way through 1 Timothy and Lamentations, I'll be ok.)
    - Taylor Swift won't help them in relationships; Lebron won't help them in their career. The Word of God gives them life.
  - Or here is how I see their lives: **THE ROCK**

- **It was by the Word...**

- God created everything.
- Raised Jesus from the dead
- Gave sight to the blind...
- By a word that Revelation says he will destroy the works of the Enemy in the end and make all things new
- It is by the Word that will free you from addiction, piece back together the broken shards of your marriage; give you sight and make you walk...
- The word is light, life, and salvation. By the word he redeems, reconciles, restores, and renews

**The problem is not that we don't know how valuable the Bible is.**

The problem is that we have never brought our practice in line with our beliefs.

- **Let me prove it to you.**
  - *If I offered you 500K to never touch the Bible again: never hear it, read it, talk about it, or even think about it, would you accept that?*
  - Most of you would say “no.” So think about that. You just identified this as an asset worth over ½ million dollars. Is there any other ½ million asset you'd just ignore? **If that shows you the value you place on the word, why are you not devouring it?**
  - BTW, even those of you who say, **“I'm not sure** it even is the Word of God...” If I offered you that \$500K to never read or hear or think about the Bible again, would you take it? Most of you would say, **“No,”** because if there is even a chance it is Word of God, you wouldn't want to be cut off from it, not even for \$500K. So if you think it has that much *potential* value, why aren't you devouring it to figure out if it actually is the Word of God?

***So why not let this year be the year that you changed that?***

**Last verse in Psalm:** [176] I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

- I see a contradiction...
- Throughout this Psalm he says things like, “God, I hate double-mindedness. But I am double-minded. I love your word. But I love other stuff more. Make my heart love it.”<sup>9</sup>
- And you think, “Well, which is it?” Does he love it, or does he not?

Here’s the answer: *He wants to love it, but he knows his heart to be divided. So he resolves to love it, and asks God to bring his heart into line.*

- He’s like me!
- Prone to wander, Lord I feel it!

**Christian growth begins by confessing to God what we are not, and then asking God to make us into what we know we should be, what Jesus died so we could be.**

For most of us, including me, the Word doesn’t have nearly the place of prominence it should.

**Why don’t we resolve together that this year will be the year of the Bible for us?** That we will hate double-mindedness, and we will ask God to change our hearts so the Word of God becomes our prize, our passion, and our most cherished possession—that we would seek it more than riches and pant for it more than a drowning man would pant for another breath!

Get the resources! Join my family is doing this.

Let’s pray.

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<sup>9</sup> vv. 36; 37; 111–112

