

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to help you talk about God's word and Pastor Brian's message with friends and family. You of course can use your own questions, but we'd like to give you this tool to encourage Biblical fellowship and discipleship in your circle of relationships. ***Enjoy discovering more about Him!***

"THE IMPORTANCE OF READING WELL" | PSALM 19 | GUEST PASTOR NATE HOLDRIDGE

WARM-UP QUESTION:

Where is your favorite memory of being outdoors or in nature?

"Nature" (Psalm 19: 1-6)

David looks at nature and sees God's glory and amazing work. **How does nature impact people in our culture today? How can Christ followers point to God through nature?**

"Scripture" (Psalm 19: 7-11)

David shares his love for Scripture, pointing to the many ways it is good for people. **How do people view the Bible in our culture today? What are ways people can benefit from God's Word?**

"Self" (Psalm 19: 12-14)

After looking at nature and at scripture, David is very aware of how he falls short and needs grace, and then asks for it. **When have you become aware of your need for grace? How did you respond in that moment?**

REFLECTION QUESTION:

God is revealed through nature, through scripture, and through a person's conscience. The best revelation is in God's Son, Jesus, who offers us grace through His death on a cross. **Have you been aware of God's glory, goodness and grace lately? What change could you make so you could be more aware of Him? Pray that Jesus would reveal more of himself to you.**

The Importance Of Reading Well (Psalm 19)

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. 1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, 5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

12 Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. 13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have

dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. 14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19, ESV)

Introduction

Today, from this psalm, I want to talk with you about the importance of reading well. I do not mean the reading of many books or articles or Instagram comments, but the reading of nature, Scripture, and yourself.

That is what this psalm sings about. David had looked at nature and come to a wise conclusion. Then he looked at Scripture and came to a wise conclusion. And finally, he looked at himself and came to a wise conclusion. He had read well.

It is an exciting passage because it highlights both *general* and *special* revelation from God. If those terms aren't familiar to you, general revelation is what God tells us about himself through nature, and special revelation is what God tells us about himself through the Bible. General revelation reaches everyone everywhere, but special revelation must be read or heard preached. And since this psalm does such a good job of laying out both general and special revelation, it is tempting to turn any meditation on it into a classroom lecture on both.

But, however helpful that lecture might be, it would dilute what is happening in this psalm. What we have is a man who has read both nature and Scripture and has come to the right conclusions. From nature, he has determined that God is glorious. From Scripture, he has determined that God's way is

wonderful. And both have helped him understand himself and his need for grace. Because he read well, he arrived in the right place, and he penned a powerful poem of praise, a psalm C.S. Lewis, a pretty good writer in his own right, called "one of the greatest lyrics in the world."¹

Not everyone reads nature, Scripture, or the self as David did. At some point, many look into general or special revelation and come to the wrong conclusions. So how did *this* man read nature, Scripture, and himself? What led him to look into all three and rejoice over God?

1. Nature (1-6)

First, nature showed David that God is glorious. He said that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (1). David, who spent many years outdoors, first as a shepherd and later as a fugitive, was a man well-acquainted with the natural world. He didn't know about screen time or artificial light. He was in tune with the earth's rhythms, the changing of the seasons, and the behavior of the sun and stars.

He would never have talked about the teleological case for God—but he believed it—a line of reasoning pointing out the natural world's finely tuned design. Just as you would never look at a Honda and think it arrived without a designer and builder, David would never have looked at a sheep or listened to his harp, or tasted honeycomb without thinking a designing God was behind it all.

Nor would David have ever talked about the cosmological case for God—but he believed it—a line of reasoning that concludes everything we see had a beginning, so something without a beginning must have caused the original beginning. Finite things exist; someone must cause these finite things to exist; there cannot be an infinite regress of causes; so there must be an uncaused cause of everything that exists, an infinite that made the finite.² And when David drank in the stars in the dark of night and noted the daily course of the sun, he knew there was someone bigger than himself who started it all.

*And David would have never talked about the moral case for God—but he believed it—a line of reasoning that points out the moral nature of human beings as a clue that an ultimate lawgiver exists. Human behaviors have varied from culture to culture, but the ethical creeds humans *write down* from culture to culture don't vary much.² We might not *practice* what we think is right, but there is remarkable unity across time and space about what we *think* is right. You don't have lots of cultures that think murder (thou shall not kill) or theft (thou shall not steal) is great, for instance. Paul alluded to this when he wrote that when people without the law of Scripture do what it requires, they are showing the work of the law is written on their hearts—their own conscience is bearing witness to a Bible they've never read (Rom 2:12-16). But even though David wouldn't have articulated it quite like Paul did, he knew that even though humankind is marred by sin and therefore flawed, God had made us in his image.*

And David rejoiced that God's glory and handiwork as found in nature were read everywhere and by everyone. He pointed out how God's revelation in nature is *continuous*—day to day it pours out its speech, and night to night it reveals its knowledge (2). He pointed out how God's revelation in nature is

non-verbal—it has no speech or words or voice, but because it has no language barrier to break, it goes out through all the earth, to the end of the world (4). He pointed out how God's revelation in nature is *universal*—to the very end of the earth, everywhere, and everyone reads God's nature book (4).

In it, God's handiwork is proclaimed (1). He is revealed as *eternal* because something preexistent must have started all that is. He is revealed as *infinite* because only an ultimate power could create something from nothing. He is revealed as *wise* because all he has made shows him as intelligent and discerning in how he made it. He is revealed as *good* because the world he commissioned for us is a good world. He is revealed as *unparalleled* because there are only two categories now—created and creator, and he stands alone in the creator column. He is revealed as *faithful* because he made a dependable world with days, seasons, and years. And he is revealed as *loving* because even though he made the vastness of the categories, he placed such attention on little planet Earth.

As Paul said in Romans:

“...What may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:19–20, NIV)

Augustine said it this way:

*"You're the creator of all the natural world...there is, in every sense, nowhere for anyone to draw back from you."*³

It is, of course, entirely possible to read nature and Scripture poorly. To look into the cosmos and see a random and extreme chance, to see all that exists as the luckiest and most unexplainable outcome, is to read nature poorly. And in David's time, a wrong reading of nature did not lead to a belief in random chance but a trust in false deities. The very elements that should've pointed everyone to God often became the objects of worship, so that soon there were sun gods, water gods, wind gods, harvest gods, etc.

So David was careful to show how creation should not lead to the worship of creation, but an appreciation for it and the worship of the God behind it, when he talked about the majesty of the sun (4-6). Though many cultures worshipped the sun, David celebrated it with the ancient image of a bridegroom exiting the wedding tent as a newly married man—each morning felt like a fresh and glorious start to David. And he also pictured the sun as a world-class athlete (strong man) running its course with joy each day. And David pointed out that nothing on earth is hidden from the sun's heat (6). Again, David means that no one escapes God's revelation in nature. We all see it. We are all impacted by it.

And what David saw led him to praise God for his glory and handiwork (1). I hope my comments so far have not suffocated the joy in this song. David joined the saints of heaven who sing:

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will, they existed and were created.”
(Revelation 4:11, ESV)

We, too, must read God's nature book well. I recently read an article in which a scientist attempted to explain why dogs will sometimes tilt their heads to the

side when we talk to them.⁴ Their conclusion? Because the dog is trying to understand something. I love that! God didn't have to do that, but he did.

When the sun arises each day, we must praise God for his faithfulness. All we see and enjoy and depend on in creation should bring us to praise God for his beautiful work and endless glory. The flight of the hummingbird, the course of the planets, the power of a cell—all of it, as we discover it, should bring us closer to God and deeper into worship.

2. Scripture (7-11)

Second, Scripture showed David that God is good. In the second section of the psalm, David changed his focus from nature to Scripture. C.S. Lewis thought that David moved on from talking about how nothing is hidden from the heat of the sun to talking about God's law because nothing is hidden from its heat, either.¹ And just as the sun is the dominant feature of God's natural revelation, the law—the religious, moral, and civil rules which governed ancient Israel—is the dominant feature of God's special revelation in the Old Testament.⁵

But he also seems to be deep in his understanding of God in this second portion. Only here does David begin to refer to God by his name—the LORD or Yahweh. Nature could show him the universe's creator God, but Scripture could show him Israel's Yahweh God.

And when David shifted his focus to Scripture, he also switched up his writing style. He began the psalm with long lyrical sentences about nature, but here it is written in short bursts about God's word. It's like he shifted from Adelle's long, balladic lines to NF's staccato, rapid-fire lyrics. All the lines are shorter in this second movement—The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. And on and on. It is a true "drop-the-mic" example of Hebrew parallelism.⁶

In this section, David mentions six attributes, six effects, and six titles for the law.

- As for attributes, David thought the law was perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true (7-9).
- As for effects, David thought the law could revive the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, endure forever, and be altogether righteous (7-9).
- And as for titles, David called it the law of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, the precepts of the Lord, the commandment of the Lord, the fear of the Lord, and the rules of the Lord (7-9).

Clearly, David thought of the law of the Lord as something to be obeyed when he called it God's law, commandments, and rules. But he also thought that obedience would lead to an incredible standard of living—revived souls, bright eyes, joyful hearts.

It's as if David thought that the law and all the restrictions it placed on him were—gulp—*good for him*. It revived him because it has a restorative quality to it. It made him solid because it has a wisdom-imparting nature to it. It made him joyful because it helped him experience the God who fashioned him. It

made him bright-eyed because of the deep internal joy that comes through fellowship with God. In short, it did wonders for David. He would have agreed with Paul's assessment:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness..."(2 Timothy 3:16, ESV)

But David and Paul's joy over the Bible is not how everyone feels about it. This is the fascinating nature of the Scripture. Reading nature well is a good start, but it is not a guarantee that someone will read Scripture well. David came to a place of deep appreciation for the law of God found in the Bible. He felt it was good medicine, nutritive stuff, that led him to the best imaginable life. So he concluded, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (10-11).

I believe this is likely where the rubber of the psalm meets the road of our lives. We might love God's green earth and celebrate him for its gifts and goodness, but do we think highly of his word? For many modern believers, the answer is no, especially when it comes to the moral restrictions it places upon those who want to follow him.

Who is he to tell us how to live? First, he is our creator God, who loves us more than we will ever fully know. Since he designed us, he knows how we function best as individuals and as a collective. Second, he is best positioned to tell us how to live because he is the only one impartial enough to weigh in on it. God is complete. Nothing can be added to him or taken from him. He is not depleted by our disobedience or completed by our obedience. His eternal love, joy, and satisfaction will remain forever and ever, whether we follow him

or not. But from his heart of love, he tells us the truth about what is best for us. It does not matter to him if this makes him more or less popular. And it is this independence of God that should make us perk up and listen to him.

I once heard a story of a young man whose job on the family ranch was to ride miles of fenceline each day, looking for damage. He said that cattle are dumb at everything except finding a hole in the fence. So often, that's our approach to God's commands. We are looking for holes rather than celebrating its good jurisdiction over our lives. Like David, we should celebrate and honor God for the goodness of the word.

3. Self (12-14)

Finally, all this helped David read himself well. At the end of the song, he wrote, "Who can discern his errors? (12). Who out there has the self-perception required to discover all his secret faults? But though David couldn't see all his faults, he knew they were there, so he prayed that God would declare him innocent from hidden faults and keep him back from presumptuous sins (12-13). He pleaded with God for victory over sin when he said, "Let them not have dominion over me!"** (13). His whole hope was that he could be blameless and innocent and acceptable in God's sight (13-14). All this was an appeal to his rock and redeemer (14).

Any proper reading of nature and then Scripture will lead someone here. It's like David had gone through God's well-designed funnel. First, the creation pointed him to God's glory. Second, the law pointed him to God's goodness.

But, while processing that good law, David saw his tendency and desire to break the law. He had read nature well. He had read the law well. And now he read himself well. He was not as glorious or good as the God he found in nature and Scripture. So he took the final step and asked for God's grace and mercy.

And this is where the loudest and clearest of God's revelation comes into play. Yes, God has spoken in nature. Yes, God has spoken in Scripture. "But," as Hebrews says, "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...After making a purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high" (Hebrews 12:1-3)

Jesus created the world, is the heir of the entire natural realm, and upholds it by his power. And Jesus is the exact imprint of God's nature—meaning he is God—and he made the only way for us to be purified from our sins. At the cross, Jesus died in place of sinful humanity, was buried, rose from the dead, and then ascended to sit down next to the Father. And it is at his cross we see the clearest revelation of who God is.

Nature could show us the universe's *Creator God*. The law could show us Israel's *Yahweh God*. But only the cross can show us that he can become our *Father God*.

[1] C.S. Lewis, Reflection on the Psalms

[2] Norman Geisler, A Prolegomena to Evangelical Theology

[3] Augustine, Confessions

[4]

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-do-dogs-tilt-their-heads-to-the-side/?amp=true>

[5] The Bible Knowledge Commentary

[6] James Montgomery Boice, Psalms, Volume 1: An Expository Commentary