

Sweeter Than Honey

On the Word of God, the Life of the Christian, and the Breadth of Scripture

There is a question that most Christians would rather not be asked directly: how well do you actually know your Bible? The question is uncomfortable because most of us already know the answer. We know the familiar passages. We can find the Psalms and the Gospels. We have a handful of verses committed to memory, usually the ones that comfort us, and we return to them the way a person returns to the same chair in the same room. The chair is good. There is nothing wrong with the chair. The problem is that God gave us a house, and we have only been living in one room.

The instinct to read Scripture at all is a good one, and the person who opens the Bible even occasionally is doing something the unregenerate heart has no desire to do. But there is a difference between reading the Bible and living in it, and most of us know which side of that line we fall on. The Bible makes claims about itself that, if true, should change the way we approach it entirely. It is not a supplement to the Christian life. It is the means by which the living God sustains and shapes His people, and it has been that from the beginning.

David wrote a single Psalm that traces this reality from the sky to the scroll to the human heart. Psalm 19 begins with the heavens declaring the glory of God and ends with a man on his knees asking to be made acceptable. The movement between those two points is the movement we will follow here. If we walk through the Psalm carefully, we will see what God has given us in His Word, what that Word does when it is received, and why the Christian who reads broadly and

regularly across the whole of Scripture is standing on ground that the selective reader has never found.

I. The Heavens Declare

*“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his
handiwork.” — Psalm 19:1 (ESV)*

Before there was a written word, God was already speaking. David opens Psalm 19 with a declaration that has no beginning and no interruption: *“Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world”* (Psalm 19:2–4). The sun, the stars, the rhythm of day and night: all of it is testimony. God has embedded a witness to Himself in the fabric of the created order, and that witness has never stopped speaking.

Paul confirms the reach of this testimony in Romans. *“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:20). General revelation is sufficient to leave every human being accountable. The person who looks at the night sky and sees nothing beyond hydrogen and physics has suppressed what God has made plain. The knowledge is there. The problem is not a lack of evidence. The problem is a refusal to receive it.

But notice what general revelation does and does not accomplish. It reveals that God exists. It reveals that He is powerful. It declares His glory in a way that reaches every corner of the earth. What it does not do is tell you His name. It does not tell you that He is merciful. It does not explain the cross or the covenant or the promise made to Abraham. It does not tell the sinner how to be

reconciled to the holy God whose power is on display in every sunrise. A person could spend a lifetime studying the heavens and arrive at awe without ever arriving at the gospel.

This is why what David does next in the Psalm matters so much. He does not stay in the sky. He moves from the heavens to the Word, from the glory of creation to the glory of Scripture, and when he does, the tone shifts. The first six verses of Psalm 19 are beautiful. What follows is intimate. God has not left us with the general testimony of the cosmos. He has spoken further, in words, in sentences, in a Book that can be held and read and returned to. The author of Hebrews captures this movement: *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”* (Hebrews 1:1–2). God spoke. He kept speaking. And He preserved what He spoke so that His people could hear Him across every generation.

II. The Law of the Lord Is Perfect

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.” — Psalm 19:7

David’s transition from sky to Scripture is one of the most striking shifts in all the Psalms. The language changes. The rhythm changes. The vocabulary becomes precise and stacked. In six lines, David describes the Word of God with a density that rewards slow reading:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of

*the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and
righteous altogether.” (Psalm 19:7–9)*

Six descriptions. Six characteristics. Each one reveals something about what Scripture is, and each one reflects the God who gave it. The law is perfect because God is perfect. The testimony is sure because God is faithful. The precepts are right because God is just. The commandment is pure because God is holy. The rules are true because God cannot lie. Scripture is not a flawed human record of divine encounters. It is the self-disclosure of a God whose character guarantees the character of everything He has spoken.

Peter understood this when he wrote that *“no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Peter 1:20–21). The prophets did not generate Scripture from their own insight. They were carried. The Spirit moved them, and what they produced bears the stamp of the God who moved them. This is why Paul can say that *“all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The word Paul uses is *theopneustos*: God-breathed. Scripture originates in the breath of God. And the result of that origin is a Word that leaves the believer *complete*. Equipped. Lacking nothing essential for the life God has called us to.

The Westminster Confession puts the point with characteristic precision: the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. Nothing essential is missing. God did not give His people an incomplete word and then

leave them to fill in the gaps with human speculation. He gave a full word, a sufficient word, a word that the Psalmist calls perfect.

The Puritan Thomas Watson, writing in his *Body of Divinity*, captures what this should mean for how we approach the Bible: “Read the Scripture, not only as a history, but as a love letter sent to you from God, which may affect your hearts.” Watson understood that the nature of Scripture determines the posture of the reader. If this Book is what David says it is, if it is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true, then it is not a textbook to be consulted. It is a communication from a God who loves His people and who gave them His Word because He intended them to know Him through it. The person who reads the Bible as mere history will gain information. The person who reads it as a love letter will be changed by it.

Isaiah provides the imagery that seals this point: “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever*” (Isaiah 40:8). Every other word decays. Every human system of thought corrodes over time. The philosophies that seemed permanent in one century are footnotes in the next. The Word of God does not share that trajectory. It endures. And the person who builds a life on it is building on something that will outlast everything else.

III. Reviving, Rejoicing, Enlightening

“The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.” — Psalm 19:8

David does not only describe what Scripture is. He describes what it does. Each of the six lines in Psalm 19:7–9 pairs a description with an effect, and the effects are remarkable. The law revives the soul. The testimony makes wise the simple. The precepts rejoice the heart. The

commandment enlightens the eyes. These are not theoretical claims. They are descriptions of what happens to a person who actually engages with the Word of God.

Consider the first: *reviving the soul*. The Hebrew word carries the sense of restoring life, turning someone back from exhaustion or desolation. David is saying that the Word of God takes a depleted soul and fills it again. This is language of sustenance, and it connects directly to what Moses told Israel in the wilderness. “*And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*” (Deuteronomy 8:3). God deliberately created the conditions of hunger so that His provision would be tasted and trusted. He let Israel’s stomachs empty so they would learn that the deepest sustenance comes from His Word.

Jesus quotes this passage when Satan tempts Him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:4). The first temptation is to turn stones into bread, to use divine power to satisfy a physical need. Jesus refuses, and the refusal carries the full weight of what Moses taught. The Son of God, hungry in the desert, declares that the Word of God is more necessary than food. If that is true of the incarnate Son, how much more should it shape the daily habits of those who follow Him?

The effects David describes are cumulative. They deepen with sustained exposure. A person who reads the Bible once will receive something from it. The Word of God is living and active, and even a single encounter with it can cut to the heart (Hebrews 4:12). But the reviving, the wisdom, the joy, the sight that David describes are the fruit of dwelling in the Word over time. The soul that needs reviving today will need reviving again next week. The eyes that are enlightened by this morning’s reading will encounter new darkness by evening. Scripture meets the believer in the ongoing reality of life in a fallen world, and its effects are designed for repetition.

Peter puts the ongoing nature of this dependence in language that echoes the manna: *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good”* (1 Peter 2:2–3). The longing Peter describes is the longing of someone who has tasted something and wants more of it. It is not the dutiful obedience of a person checking a box on a spiritual to-do list. It is appetite. And appetite grows by feeding, not by fasting. The Christian who reads regularly develops a taste for the Word that the occasional reader simply does not have.

Nehemiah 8 gives us a vivid picture of what it looks like when Scripture does what David says it does. The people of Israel have returned from exile. Ezra stands on a wooden platform and reads the Law of Moses from early morning until midday. The Levites help the people understand what is being read. And the people weep. They weep because they hear what God has said and realize how far they have drifted from it. The Word has done exactly what Psalm 19 promises: it has revived, it has enlightened, it has exposed. But then comes the turn. Nehemiah tells the people: *“Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Nehemiah 8:10). The same Word that broke them also rebuilt them. Conviction and consolation arrived together, in a single reading, from the same God. That is what the Word does. It tears down what needs tearing down and builds up what needs building up, and it does both at the same time because both operations come from the same loving hand.

IV. More to Be Desired Than Gold

“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.” — Psalm 19:10

David now shifts from what Scripture does to what it becomes for the person who dwells in it: *“Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward”* (Psalm 19:11).

This is experiential language. David is not stating a theological proposition here. He is describing a taste. He has lived in the Word long enough that its sweetness has become more real to him than the sweetness of the best things the world can offer. Gold represents security. Honey represents pleasure. David says the Word surpasses both. That claim does not make sense to someone who has never spent sustained time in Scripture. It makes perfect sense to someone who has.

Psalm 119 extends this theme across 176 verses, the longest chapter in the Bible, all of it devoted to the excellence of God’s Word. The Psalmist writes, *“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”* (Psalm 119:103). And again: *“Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day”* (Psalm 119:97). This is not the language of obligation. It is the language of love. The Psalmist does not read the law because he has to. He meditates on it all day because he wants to, because something in the Word has captured him in a way that nothing else can satisfy.

How does this kind of love for Scripture develop? It does not come from reading a verse a day pulled from a calendar. It comes from sustained, broad, canonical engagement with the whole of what God has said. And this is where a particular danger must be addressed. Many Christians read the Bible selectively. They have favorite books, favorite passages, favorite promises. They

return to the same texts and draw comfort from them, and that comfort is real. There is nothing wrong with having a well-worn path through the Psalms or the Gospel of John. The danger is in mistaking the path for the landscape. God did not give us sixty-six books so that we could read twelve of them.

Watson, again in his *Body of Divinity*, makes this point with force: “The two Testaments are the two wells of salvation. The Antinomians would stop up one of these wells; they would dry up one of the breasts of Scripture. There is much gospel in the Old Testament. The comforts of the gospel in the New Testament have their rise from the Old.” Watson is identifying a problem that did not end with the Antinomians. It persists wherever Christians treat the Old Testament as background material, as ancient history that has been superseded by the New. The two Testaments are two wells drawing from the same underground river. The Christian who drinks from only one is drinking less than God intended.

Watson’s observation that the comforts of the New Testament “have their rise from the Old” deserves careful attention. Consider what John the Baptist says when he sees Jesus approaching: “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). To the reader who knows only the Gospels, this is a striking metaphor. To the reader who has walked through Genesis 22, where God provided the ram in place of Isaac; through Exodus 12, where the blood of the Passover lamb protected Israel’s firstborn; through Leviticus, where the sacrificial system revealed the cost of approaching a holy God; through Isaiah 53, where the Servant is led like a lamb to the slaughter and bears the iniquity of us all: to that reader, John’s words are not a metaphor. They are the climax of a story that has been building for two thousand years. Every lamb sacrificed on every altar in Israel’s history was pointing forward to this moment. The reader

who has traced that thread through the canon feels the weight of John's declaration in a way that the reader who encounters it in isolation simply cannot.

The same principle applies throughout the New Testament. Hebrews 4:14–16 invites believers to *“draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* The language is warm and accessible. But the full weight of that invitation depends on knowing what it replaced. Under the Levitical system, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and he could do so only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, carrying blood that was not his own, with the threat of death if he approached wrongly. The author of Hebrews is saying that what Aaron could do once a year with trembling, believers can now do at any moment with confidence, because Christ has entered the true Holy Place once for all. The reader who has walked through Leviticus feels the staggering generosity of that access. The reader who has not is receiving good news without understanding how good it actually is.

Jesus Himself modeled this kind of canonical reading. On the road to Emmaus, walking with two disciples who were grieving and confused, Luke records that *“beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27). Later that evening He told the gathered disciples: *“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–45). Christ's own hermeneutic was canonical. He read Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms as a unified testimony pointing to Himself. He expected His disciples to do the same. A Christian who reads only the New Testament is reading the conclusion without the argument, the resolution without the tension, the answer without the question that makes the answer intelligible.

This is also where the danger of proof-texting finds its corrective. When individual verses are pulled from their context and made to stand alone, they can be bent into shapes the original author never intended. Context is not a luxury for scholars. It is the difference between understanding what God said and constructing what we wish He had said. The analogy of faith, Scripture interpreting Scripture, only works if you have read enough Scripture for one passage to shed light on another. The Christian who reads broadly across the canon develops a feel for the whole story, and that feel functions as a safeguard against mishandling any particular part.

V. Declare Me Innocent from Hidden Faults

“Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults.” —

Psalm 19:12

After describing what the Word is, what it does, and what it becomes to the person who loves it, David turns the lens on himself. The transition is sudden and honest: *“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”* (Psalm 19:13).

Something has happened between verse 11 and verse 12. David has been contemplating the perfection and sweetness of the Word, and the light of that Word has fallen on him, and he has seen something he could not see before. Hidden faults. Errors he cannot discern on his own. The Word has functioned as a mirror, and the reflection has humbled him.

James picks up this exact image: *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like”* (James 1:22–24). James is warning against a kind of engagement with Scripture that sees

but does not act, that receives the diagnosis but refuses the treatment. The mirror is clear. The problem is that people walk away from it. David does the opposite. He stares into the mirror and asks God to clean what he sees there.

David's prayer reveals something essential about the function of broad, canonical reading. "Hidden faults" are the sins we do not know we are committing. They are the blind spots that only become visible when enough light enters the room. A narrow reading diet produces narrow self-knowledge. The Christian who only reads the passages that comfort will never encounter the passages that convict. The Christian who avoids the prophets will miss God's searing assessment of religious complacency, the warnings against those who honor Him with their lips while their hearts are far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). The Christian who skips the law will not understand the depth of holiness God requires, and without that understanding, the grace that meets that requirement in Christ will feel smaller than it actually is.

The breadth of Scripture functions as a corrective lens that we did not know we needed until we looked through it. Hebrews 4:12–13 makes this explicit: *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* The transition from "the word of God" to "him to whom we must give account" is seamless. The Word is not separate from the God who speaks it. When Scripture penetrates to the division of soul and spirit, it is God Himself doing the examining. And His examination reaches the places we cannot.

David also prays against "presumptuous sins," the kind of deliberate rebellion that a person walks into with open eyes. He asks God to keep him from them. The Word addresses both

categories: it reveals what we cannot see, and it warns against what we might be tempted to choose. *“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you”* (Psalm 119:11). The Word stored up functions as a preventive. It guards the heart the way a wall guards a city. But the wall has to be built, stone by stone, reading by reading, and it has to be maintained. That is daily work. The Christian who reads the Bible regularly is constructing a defense that the occasional reader does not have.

The two categories of sin David identifies, hidden faults and presumptuous sins, correspond to two functions of Scripture that Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:16. Paul says Scripture is profitable for teaching and training in righteousness, but he also says it is profitable for reproof and correction. Teaching and training build up. Reproof and correction tear down what needs to be torn down. The Christian who only reads for comfort is receiving the first two and missing the second two. God gave all four because we need all four. The physician who only prescribes the medicine that tastes good is doing his patient no favors.

VI. Let the Words of My Mouth Be Acceptable

“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 19:14

Follow the arc of what has happened. David started with the heavens declaring God’s glory. He moved to the Written Word and its perfection. He traced its effects on the soul. He tasted its sweetness. He saw himself in its mirror and found sins he did not know he had. And now he stands before God, not with a resolution to try harder, but with a prayer of dependence. The entire Psalm has been a movement inward and downward, from the glory of the cosmos to the corruption of the human heart, and the only appropriate response at the end is not self-improvement. It is worship.

This is what sustained engagement with Scripture produces. It does not produce self-confidence. It produces the kind of humility that can only come from seeing God clearly and seeing yourself clearly at the same time. The more you read, the more you see of God's holiness and your own insufficiency, and the more you are driven to rest in what God has done rather than in what you can do. The endpoint of serious, regular Bible reading is not theological expertise. It is dependence.

David's final words are theologically loaded. He calls God "*my rock and my redeemer.*" Rock is stability. It is the God who does not change, the One whose word stands forever, the foundation that will not shift when everything else does. Redeemer is covenant language. It is the kinsman-redeemer, the one who pays the price to bring His people back. David has moved from general revelation to special revelation to self-examination to a confession of dependence on the God who is both unshakable and redemptive. He stands at the end of the Psalm in the only position that makes sense for a creature who has read the Word honestly: small, grateful, and resting on a God who is bigger than everything the mirror revealed.

Paul urges the Colossians toward the same posture: "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (Colossians 3:16). The word *richly* is doing important work. Paul does not say let the word of Christ pass through you occasionally. He says let it dwell. Let it take up residence. Let it fill the house. And the word *richly* suggests abundance, overflow, a cup that runs over. This is a call to saturation, not moderation. The Christian life is designed to be lived in sustained contact with the Word, reading it, hearing it preached, meditating on it, letting it shape thought and speech and action across every sphere of life.

Jesus prayed for this in the Upper Room: "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*" (John 17:17). The means of sanctification is the truth, and the truth is the Word. The Christian who

wants to grow in holiness has one primary instrument available, and it is not willpower or moral effort or better habits. It is the Word of God, received in faith, applied by the Spirit, and absorbed over a lifetime of reading. Paul tells the Romans that transformation comes by “*the renewal of your mind*” (Romans 12:2), and there is no surer way to renew the mind than to fill it, regularly and broadly, with the Word that God breathed out for exactly that purpose.

VII. My Rock and My Redeemer

The Psalm that began in the sky ends in a prayer. David has moved from the glory of God displayed in creation to the perfection of His Word, from the sweetness of that Word to the exposure of his own hidden sins, and from that exposure to the only posture that remains: dependence on a God who is both rock and redeemer. That arc is not accidental. It is the arc that sustained, canonical reading of Scripture produces in every believer who takes the journey.

The Bible is not a reference manual to be consulted when trouble comes. It is the living Word of the living God, and it does things to the person who reads it. It revives. It gives wisdom. It produces joy. It opens eyes. It exposes what is hidden. It guards against what is deliberate. And over time, to the person who stays in it, who reads broadly and returns daily, it becomes sweeter than honey and more valuable than gold. That is not a promise God makes about any other book in the world. It is a promise He makes about His own Word, and the testimony of the saints across every generation is that He keeps it.

Read the whole Bible. Read it regularly. Read the Old Testament as well as the New, and let each one illumine the other. Read the prophets and the law and the psalms and the history, because Christ Himself said that all of it speaks of Him. Read it as Watson said: as a love letter sent to you from God, which may affect your heart. And when the light of it falls on hidden faults

and presumptuous sins, do not walk away from the mirror. Stay there. Let the Word do what God designed it to do. And then pray the prayer David prayed, the prayer that every honest reader of Scripture eventually arrives at: let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

*“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than
honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”*

Psalms 19:10