

Overcoming Doubt

By: Joan Fredrickson

[00:00:00.060]

Joan Fredrickson: Thank you for that warm welcome. You know, when you get to be my age, you know everything and nobody wants to hear it. So it's wonderful to see you here this morning. The doors will be locked immediately that everyone is seated so that none of you can get away. And I have a captive audience with me to Psalm 138, if you will. Psalm 138. You're going to need your Bible in this workshop. And if you didn't bring it this morning, don't forget it tomorrow. We're going to be looking at a lot of scripture because I want to anchor you in the word. I want you to know what God says, not just what I have to say. And if those in the aisle would hurry in and get your cards registered, I'm going to pray. Father, thank you for bringing us together this morning. We pray that you will bless our lives through through your word in the application of your word to our lives.

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Lord, we want to live for you. We want our lives to count for you. But, Lord, that has to be your work and we trust you to do that. Speak to us now this morning in Jesus name. Amen. All right. We're going to be taking God at his word this week and we're going to be working quite a bit out of the Psalms this morning. This is a conference that is centered in the word of God and and I'm for it.

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I love that because I think it's great because I feel about the word of God the same way that God feels about the word of God. Do you know how he feels about the word of God? Let's look at it in Psalm 138. Verse one, he says, I will praise you will Lord, with all my heart. The Psalmist is

wholehearted in his praise before the gods. I will sing your praise. Then he says, I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness.

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His name includes all of his perfections, for you have exalted, above all things, your name and your word. That is a very profound verse. God has exalted, above all things, his name and his word. How is it important? Is His word to God. The King James Version says he has exalted his word above his name, even beyond his name. The new American standard says he has magnified his word according to all his name.

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I suggest to you that one reason for that is because the word of God is eternal. You know that people are always saying to you, you can't take it with you in this life. You know, you can't take it with you. You might just as well spend your money and have a good time because you can't take it with you. Well, there are three things that I know of that you can take with you out of this life.

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The first one is love, Paul says. In First Corinthians 13, faith, love and hope should receive priority. But the greatest of these is love, because love remains. First Corinthians 13:13. One day faith will turn to sight. Every hope will be fulfilled. Only love will remain so. Peter says, love one another deeply from the heart. First, Peter 1:22, the second thing that you can take with you is people, Paul says.

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What is our hope, our joy, our crown in which we glory, in the presence of the Lord Jesus. When he comes, Paul says, isn't it you? You are our joy and our crown. You are our glory. First

Thessalonians 2:19-20. We can take people with us. The people that we bring to Jesus Christ, the people that we introduce to him will be with us for all eternity. And people are eternal.

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And the third thing that we can take with us is the word of God. The Psalmist says your word O Lord is eternal. It stands firm in the heavens. Psalm 119 verse 89. Peter says, we have been born again through the living and enduring word of God. He says the word of God stands forever.

First Peter 1:23-24. What what can we take with us? We can take with us love. We can take with us people and we can take with us the word of God.

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And those three things should shape the priorities of your life. Learn to understand what matters in this world and in this life. And three of those things are love people and the word of God.

Now, I want to begin this morning with a story, and it's a story out of my own life about hunger for the word of God. My husband, Phil, and I were young, married couple when he first came to know the Lord a long time ago, and at the same time I recommitted my life to the Lord.

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We became involved in a church where the Bible was taught in a very systematic and a very expository way. Some of you are familiar with that. I'm sure some of your home churches are that way. In those days that involved the use of what then was one of the newer tools of Bible study and what is now the ancient and out-of-date Scofield reference Bible, some of you are probably familiar with that. To some of you weren't born yet when that Bible was popular, but our pastor used to say almost every service, if you don't have a Scofield reference Bible, sell your shoes and get one.

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My parents, in their excitement and our new Christian involvement in our new Christian faith and commitment, bought us one expensive Scofield reference Bible for Christmas. But more than anything in the world, I wanted my very own reference Bible. I didn't want to share it with Phil. I wanted it for myself. I wanted to study it. I wanted to mark it up and I want to put notes in the margin and scribble words in it. But we were struggling young marrieds.

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We were expecting our second child and it was no money for things like an expensive Bible. Well, one night I went to choir practice. And the choir director held up a brand new indexed red leather Scofield reference Bible, and he said, we're going to have a contest to build our choir so that we can do a special concert ministry. And whoever brings the most people to choir in the next six weeks will win this brand new Scofield reference Bible.

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I wanted that Bible with a burning passion. I know you talk about name it and claim it, I claim that Bible in my heart that night. You talk about the sin of covetousness. I coveted that Bible. And I went home and I got on the phone. And the next week I brought eight women to choir practice. One tenor brought some guy. Nobody else brought anybody. And I killed the contest. I mean, I just killed it a morning before it could hardly ever get started.

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And the choir director handed handed me that Bible for weeks early. He said, you won the Bible, but the least you could have done is brought me somebody who could sing. I didn't know that was part of the deal, but on my shelf in my office, I still have that Bible and there are some things I still use it for fall in love with the Lord of the word and then fall in love with the word because both of them are eternal.

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Now, this morning, we want to talk about taking God at his word in the area of overcoming doubt. It's going to involve four things. And I start in the morning with the letter C to help us remember, we're going to be talking about choice. We're going to be talking about commitment. About comprehension and a very interesting common denominator. There is one CD and you all know about CDs. So we have choice, we have commitment, we have comprehension and we have a common denominator.

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I want to share with you some of my life journey as we go through these three mornings together. But I want to share it only in the light of its application of the word of God to our lives. It will be the word of God that is our central focus. It is a strength. It is a central proof of everything we have to say, not our experience. We will be using experience only as an illustration. And I say that because I want you to understand that our experience is not what proves the word of God to be true.

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The word of God does not need your experience to be proved true. It is already true. It is already true. Jesus said, Father, sanctify them through your truth. Your word is truth. John 17:17. The Psalmist says the statutes that you have laid down are righteous and fully trustworthy. Your promises have been thoroughly tested. Your word is pure, your righteousness is everlasting in your law is true. Your statutes are forever right. And all of those verses are found in Psalm one hundred and nineteen between verses 138 and 144.

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Experience is useful because it helps us to make that truth real to us in the midst of real life. And I hope in these three days together that I will be able to give you some practical nuggets out of the word of God that I hope and I pray and have been hoping and praying for you for the weeks before I have come that they will last you and serve you for a lifetime, that they will be places that you will have marked out in your Bible, so that when you get into this kind of difficulty, you'll be able to go back there and put your foot on them and have them to serve you well.

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Now turn with me to Psalm one hundred and nineteen. Psalm 119, as you may be known, is a gold mine of information about the word of God. Someday I would encourage you for a devotional study to go through it and underline all the things that the word of God will do for you. Underline things like it will give you strength, it will give you hope and comfort, and then go back through it and circle all the things that you're supposed to do with it, like obey it and he commands and follow its precepts, etc.

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Now, we're going to begin this morning with verse 28 of Psalm 119. It says, my soul is weary with sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. Keep me from deceitful ways. Be gracious to me through your law. I have chosen the way of truth. I have set my heart on your laws. I hold fast to your statutes. Oh, Lord, do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

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Here is a person weary with sorrow. Have you ever been there? I know some of you have already been there because one of the most painful things in my life happened when I was just fifteen years old. So some of you already know what it is to be weary with sorrow. There is no age

discrimination in sorrow. What does the Psalmist do in his sorrow? Well, he prays for strength because the Lord has promised strength in his word.

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He is taking God at his word very literally. He dares to go before the Lord and to ask for what he needs to insist before the Lord that the Lord keep his word. He asks for Grace. And you notice that grace comes through God's law. It's another reference to his word. But then he takes some action. He makes a choice. Verse 30 says, I have chosen the way of truth. The faithful way the NAS says life is full of choices, even refusing to choose is in itself a kind of choice.

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There will be times in your life when you will doubt the goodness of the Lord because of sorrow. Circumstances overwhelm us, we become disoriented, upset, uncertain, even overwhelmed, there is direction in the world when in doubt to put yourself back on your feet, hurry to the word, make a deliberate choice, to follow his word, to do it, to act on it, to obey what it says. It's, you know, when all else fails, follow the directions.

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This is what it's here for. And when you think obedience, think, first of all, listening. Get quiet in your sorrow and your trouble. Listen to what the Lord has to say to you through the word and be as careful as you know how to be in following its instructions step by step. To do that is a choice. It is a hard choice. It's a necessary choice. And I want to illustrate it for you. I want you to keep your thumb in Psalm 119 and I want you to turn back to First Samuel, Chapter thirty, First Samuel, Chapter 30.

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It's a passage in the life of David. Last year in our Bible study class, we taught the life of David in first and second Samuel. We had a wonderful time in it. And at the end of First Samuel, we find David having fled from Saul for years and years. He is now serving and the Philistine Army under Achish. He is kind of gone over to the enemy for safekeeping away from Saul. And he had fought the enemies of Achish for some time.

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But when Achish decided to invade Israel itself and go against Saul, some of his commanders no longer trusted David. They said when he gets into the heart of the battle, he'll turn against us. He'll go back to Israel, he'll go back and fight for them. So Achish sent David home, and it's David and his men arrived at Ziklag, where they had left their families first. Samuel verse thirty, chapter thirty. Verse three says when David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.

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So David and his men wept aloud until I had no strength left to weep. Do you suppose this is an incident that might have inspired David to write that song or maybe that portion of that song? David's two wives had been captured, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him. Each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord, his God, the old King James says David comforted himself in the Lord, his God right.

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The word comforted in the margin and underlined that verse. Because somewhere in your life, you are going to need to learn how to strengthen yourself and comfort yourself in the Lord, that when you get into sorrow and difficulty and doubt and trouble, that you learn to go to the Lord

and you need to make that a deliberate choice to turn to him in the midst of that sorrow and doubt, as David did, to get quiet in his presence and to listen to his word and prepare your heart to follow its instruction.

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Now back to Psalm 119. And let me tell you another story. When we lived, we lived originally in Michigan. Are there any Michiganders here? Anybody come to Biola from Michigan? All right. And Hail to the Victors Valiant. You know, if you can say that in another college, I don't know. My husband worked for General Motors research in Warren, Michigan, at the tech center. And one August, they offered him an opportunity to transfer to a facility near Santa Barbara, California.

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It involved a promotion, a raise, and it involved a phase of work that he particularly enjoyed. He felt it was an opportunity too good to miss and that maybe the Lord had opened the door for us to make this move. This was the middle of August. We prayed for confirming direction to help us find it. We put our house on the market in the Detroit area in what was a dead, dead real estate market. We prayed, Lord, if you want us to go, you would have to sell the house.

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And if you don't sell the house, we're going to take that as an indication that we should stay. It sold in two days to the first person who looked at it in two weeks. We were on the road to California with three small children and a moving van somewhere ahead of us. When we arrived in Santa Barbara, I felt like maybe some of you did the first morning here on campus, especially those who have come from far away. I said to myself, this is not home.

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I said everything here is strange. I don't like it here, I don't know anybody here, I don't want to be here and I miss everything and I miss everybody. I miss my mom. I miss my dad. I miss my grandma. I mean, it was so bad I even missed my brothers. You know, that's really bad. I miss my church and then I said, I'm going home, I'm going home, I'm going to stay here.

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And I went to the airport and I bought two tickets. I bought a ticket for me and I and I was going to take my baby with me. And I called my husband and I said, I'll send for the kids, I'll send for the kids. As soon as I get settled back there, I'll send for the other two boys. I'm out of here. I'm going home. I went into a tailspin of depression and grief and sorrow.

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Well, I didn't go, I'm still here. Was a long time ago, but now we'll never forget the afternoon that I made the choice to stay. It was a choice. I had been talking to the Lord for weeks. I had poured out all my sorrow. I had poured out all my grievances. I had shared all my doubts about him and his word. I was mad at the Lord. I was angry. How could he do something like this to somebody so nice as me?

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I had to turn to the Lord because the bottom line is I had nowhere else to go. I had no one else to turn to. You know, we tend to say it got so bad I had to pray. And that's kind of where I was. It got so bad I had to pray, so weary with sorrow. I turned to him for strength. And one day I found myself praying, Lord, if you are there and if you are real and if your word is true, now is a time for you and I to get it together.

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Show me what to do. Keep me from going the wrong way. And I began to feel that East was maybe the wrong direction, and I prayed and I read the word and the Lord gave me the funniest verse I have ever seen in the scripture. What a sense of humor he has. As I prayed and as I studied, he gave me a verse out of Philippians four that jumped right off the page at me. It said, in whatever state you find yourself in that state, be content.

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And now. Now, I know he was not talking about the difference between California and Michigan, he was talking about being content where I was, but the word state, I can't help it. It jumped right off the page. And, you know, sometimes the Lord says interesting things to the book you see later in the best blessed afterwards of God, I discovered that the Lord had wonderful things planned for my life. And I have been privileged to teach this book in my community for more than 25 years, for closer to 30 years, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little year after year to a wide variety of people.

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And just as an aside, that kind of commitment, those of you who are are deeply intent upon ministry, the kind of commitment to where you live and where you work and where you raise your family and where you have to work with Little League and you have to work in the school and you have to work in the church is a wonderful kind of ministry where you have to back it with the integrity of your life, no matter what your life runs into, no matter if the cops bring your kid home at three o'clock in the morning, no matter what is going on, you live with it and you live it out in front of your entire community and they learn to see that God is real in every kind of circumstance.

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In fact, let me tell you a secret. Being a lay Bible teacher is the most wonderful life in the world. Shh don't tell anybody, but it is. All right. Back to my story. I didn't know the future. I trusted the Lord for the future. And a few days after that prayer, I was crossing the street and our little town between the old post office and the Bank of America. I was in the crosswalk in the middle of the street, and I made the choice that changed my life forever.

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I said, Lord, I have to trust that you have brought me to this place and that you have brought me here for a reason. And so, Lord, I choose to stay and work it out. But, Lord, I don't know how to do that, so I also choose to give myself to you for that and to the study of your word, and I set my heart on what you say to me through this book. Teach me, instruct me, show me what to do as I study it.

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Prove to me that it works. Are you willing to make that kind of prayer commitment to him this morning, are you willing to make that choice in your heart? Will you make the choice that is confronting you today? Will you follow him whatever it takes? The Psalmist, too, made a choice. He made a choice to walk in his ways, and it is a walk because the next step is commitment. I want you to look at me at Psalm 119 at the prayer of commitment.

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Overcoming doubt also involves commitment and involves choice, but it involves commitment. Verse 33, the Psalmist says teach me a lord to follow your decrees. Teach me to follow. Give me understanding and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Give me understanding to obey. Direct me in the path of your commands. For there I find delight. Direct me to go in the path. Direct me with all my heart. And again it speaks of commitment.

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We need to be wholehearted and all that we do. Verse 36 says turn my heart toward your statutes and not towards selfish gain. Incline my heart. Turn my heart. Turn my heart, Lord, to love what you love and to want what you want and to hate what you hate. If you can learn to live by that, you will save yourself so much agony in this life. Turn my heart, Lord, to love what you love, to want, what you want and to hate what you hate.

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Verse 37 says turn my eyes away from worthless things. Preserve my life according to your word. Turning my eyes to focus where he wants them focused keeps me from danger, for I begin to reflect what I behold. And as we behold him, Paul says, we begin to reflect him. We are transformed when we behold the world. And that is where our focus is. We become conformed, formed with that world. Verse 38 says, fulfill your promise to your servant so that you may be feared.

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Establish your word to your servant to me, O Lord, fulfill your promise. This verse is a call to us to receive. We need to be good receivers because God is a great giver and every wonderful thing that you can have in this life is received from the Lord. Be a good receiver. Verse 39 says take away the disgrace I dread for your laws are good. It's a prayer to be cleansed for the preservation of our integrity. When we are in the wrong, we need to be quick to admit it, to correct it, and even to know how to pray.

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We we pray this word. We pray the word of God. You will come into your life and there will be places where you don't know what to ask for. You don't know how to pray. There are prayers in

the scripture that will put you on track. And this is one of them. It's not the only one. It is one of them. And I want you to look at those first phrases again, and I want you to underline them and I want you to consider them in the light of being a university student in this room this morning, what would happen to you this semester if every morning you went before the Lord and you prayed just those first phrases you said, Lord, teach me today, give me understanding today, direct me, turn my heart, turn my eyes and fulfill your promise for my life.

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What would happen to you if you did that? I want you to know from my vantage point that prayer is terribly effective. It is terribly effective. And I want to encourage you not to read books about it and not to study about it and not to talk about it. I want you to do it because we do everything but do it. We have here a perfect prayer to help conquer and overcome doubt, there's nothing wrong with doubt. Doubt is part of the process of believing doubt.

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Conquered is faith, but doubt accepted and embraced and savored soon becomes unbelief. We want to overcome our doubts. Overcoming doubt involves choice and involves commitment. I also believe it involves a comprehension of God. The word as God is filled with insight into the Person of the Lord. And that's true here. And the more we know him, the greater will be our understanding of him, and the deeper will be our trust in him. And that trust will help us be overcomers in every area of life.

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And it will help us to overcome in our moments of doubt. Now, how is he revealed here? I suggest you that he is revealed in the words that are used in this text for the word. Verse 28 speaks of his word. Verse 29 talks about his law. Verse thirty in the NAS speaks of ordinances.

Verse 31 talks about his statutes, verse 32 talks about his commands, verse 33, his decrees and so on, all down through the psalm.

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And it's interesting to see how these words reveal to us the person of the Lord. For example, the word statute means permanent governing rule, such as the rule or laws that we see in nature, and the fact that we can count on the order of nature that morning came. This today tells us something about the order and the planning of God, and that insight increases our faith and diminishes our doubt. The word ordinance means an order giving direction or regulation, and it reveals that our Lord is the Lord of limits and boundaries.

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Events in this world are not out of his control. He sees the beginning. From the end. He is able to lead us. He is able to guide the word command means instruction from one in control or authority. And again, it enhances our confidence to get a handle on the sovereignty of God in our lives and in our world. The word testimonies speaks of his promises and the evidence of his working precepts, our general principles of rules or rules of action.

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And they are guidelines within which there is some latitude, but the boundaries are there to save us from trouble. Decrees are his judicial orders and his judgments and his decrees warn us and keep us from discipline and chastening his wonders, demonstrate his power and help us understand and comprehend that power. And what the Psalmist is doing is he is telling us all through this song that we have a trustworthy God, a Lord who has revealed himself to be a God of order and planning and power.

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He has boundaries, he has control, and he has the authority to enforce them. He has rules and principles of action that warn us and save us from trouble. And that kind of insight overcomes our doubt. We can take our doubt to the Lord he is trustworthy. And in all your Bible study, always and continually watch for the character of God and mark it out. A.W. Tozer said it. He said, we must learn to think rightly about God.

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Now, let me add one more thing. I like to call it the common denominator. And for this, keeping your thumb still in Psalm 119, I want you to turn back in the New Testament to first John chapter two. We're going to look at just one verse in there, along with my desire to own my very own study. Bible that I shared earlier was a deep hunger to understand the word of God. When we came to California, we lost our expository teacher.

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Our new pastor was a different kind of teacher. Our first pastor had taught us a lot about the Bible and what it said and how it was structured and how many times this or that word was used. He was a kind of pastor who could preach three Sundays on the word grace, you know, and he squeezed in so much stuff out of a verse that you despaired of ever finding anything in it for yourself. You just said, you know, I don't know where all that is, but I don't see it.

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Our new pastor began to teach us how it should change our heart, what it should do to us in the inside of our person, what the Lord wanted to do in our inward life. And he continually encouraged us in personal Bible study. One morning, he taught our young married couple Sunday school class and he taught us how to first John chapter two look with me at verse 27. It says, As for you, the anointing you receive. From him remains in you and you do not need

anyone to teach you, but as his anointing teaches you about all things and is that anointing is real and not counterfeit, just as it has taught you remain in him.

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And Pastor Keith said to us that morning, the spirit of God loves you and you. That's the anointing. That's the common denominator. Every one of us in this room that belongs to Jesus Christ this morning possesses the spirit of God, the spirit of God lives in us, and that undergirds everything else. And he went on to say, he is your very best teacher. Jesus said the counselor to the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name will teach you all things and remind you of everything that I have said to you.

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John 14:26 and Darryl Del Housaye this morning I quoted that passage and talked about its first application, which is to the writing of the scripture. But I still think there's an application there to us that the spirit of God will teach us all things, the spirit of God who is resident within us. And Pastor Keith said that morning he encouraged every one of us to trust the Holy Spirit in us, to be our teacher and to dare to study the word of God for ourselves and not to be satisfied until we mastered it, he said.

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What I give you on Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday Bible study, what you receive from that should be a confirmation of all that you are learning on your own in your own personal study through the week. I took him seriously. It changed my life. I became a serious lay Bible student. Now, let me show you something else from Psalm 119, go back where you have your thumb and look with me at verse 97, verse 97.

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The Psalmist begins with the phrase, oh, how I love your law, oh, how I love your law. We went to Ligonier Ministries conference in San Diego a week and a half ago, and RC Sproul did a whole message on that phrase, oh, how I love your law. I hope that's the way you feel about his word today. I meditate on it all day long. Now, look at this. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

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I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste? Sweeter than honey to my mouth. Now you may not want to point that passage out to your professors, but know it in your heart that the Lord can teach you deeply and wonderfully as you turn to him to learn.

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Now, on the basis of the encouragement of the Word of God, I embrace that common denominator that the spirit of God Almighty would teach me a simple wife, mother, the deepest things in the universe about himself. From this word, if I would make the choice to study his word, to pray for its instruction, to commit myself, to take it seriously, to live by it and to trust him, to teach me everything I needed to know that he would do it.

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And one final word that he would enable me to pass it on. I discovered that almost immediately the minute I learned something, I, I found an opportunity to share it, as is a biblical example for us in this, Ezra says, devoted himself to the study of the word of God in order to do the word of

God and then to teach the word of God. Ezra 7:10. Jesus said if anyone would choose to do God's will, he will find out whether or not his teaching comes from God.

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John 7:17, in other words, use you study the word of God and then you do the word of God, and then you find out whether or not the word of God is true. In that sense, then what the Lord teaches you, he will give you an opportunity to share with someone else. And as your faithful to do this, the opportunities to share will go on and on and ongoing away. The spirit of God is resident within you.

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Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you? First Corinthians 3:16. If anyone doesn't have the spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to Christ. Romans 8:9. And that anointing within you teaches you. He teaches me. We have that in common. Nothing will overcome your doubts. Like having the word speak to your heart and I would encourage you not to settle for less. How do we overcome our doubts about the word of God and the God of the word?

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Let's summarize for a minute. We take his word and his person seriously, recognizing that the word is a top priority with the Lord. He has exalted his word with his name, and it endures forever. Secondly, we make a deliberate choice to follow its instruction and its truth by his strength, through obedience. And as a result, we prove it out. In our experience, we commit ourselves to the Lord praying his instruction, knowing we are endowed by the greatest teacher in the universe, God, the Holy Spirit.

[00:38:18.020]

We take the comprehension of God seriously in the words so that we grow in our knowledge of him, asking ourselves continuously, what is he like learning to think rightly about the Lord? And then we take seriously his stated desire to teach us. Then we study his word in order to do it and then to share it with others. If we take God at his word, he will overcome all our doubts one by one, as we meet them on life's journey.

[00:38:47.390]

Let's pray together, Father. How we thank you for our time this morning in the book. I pray, Lord that every person in this room would learn to become a person of the word, that they would love you with their whole heart and they would love your word with their whole heart, and that they would seek to serve you with a whole heart. Lord, when I came this morning, I have been praying for these people and I told you I believe my replacement is in this room, that someday there will be men and women in this room.

[00:39:29.020]

Who will stand on this platform and teach subsequent generations the things that you have given them out of the word, so Lord, I hold this group up to you and I pray your protection around them. I pray that you will not allow them to do anything that will ruin the potential that you have for their lives. Protect them from themselves, Lord, and hold them close to your heart. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.