

LESSON 1 . . . Three Keys to a Happy Life (119:1-8)



NOTES

We are beginning an amazing “Journey” through Psalm 119. Each lesson will increase our *Delight in God’s Word*. This psalm is a powerful kaleidoscope, illustrating the importance of the Bible from every imaginable perspective. It is a unique chapter of the Bible in many ways. Here are some amazing facts about Psalm 119:

- It is the longest chapter in the Bible. (176 verses)
- It has 171 verses that directly mention God’s Word.
- It contains more words than 30 entire books of the Bible.
- It is an acrostic poem of the Hebrew alphabet.
- Its singular focus is to express the foundational importance of God’s Word in every part of life.

During the Protestant Reformation, the battle cry of the Reformers was *sola Scriptura*—Latin for “Scripture only.” This phrase declared the absolute, exclusive authority of Scripture—above church traditions, councils, or any human opinion. The reformers correctly believed every teaching and practice in the church and Christian life must conform to Scripture alone.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul writes that *all scripture* is inspired by God and is *profitable* for teaching, correcting, and righteous training. Then, according to the next verse, what is the ultimate goal of studying *scripture* (3:17)?

Psalm 119 is arranged into twenty-two stanzas of eight verses; each stanza is headed by the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example: above verse one is the word ALEPH (Ah’-lef), above verse nine is the word BETH, and above verse seventeen is the word GIMEL (Gē’-mel). All the Hebrew letters with their English names are listed in the right margin.

It is like someone asked the psalmist: “What does God’s Word mean to you?” And the psalmist replies, “Let me count the ways with a song using eight verses for every letter in the alphabet!”

In the first section of eight verses, we can find **three keys to a happy life**.



Key #1: Purity (119:1-4)

This psalm begins: *Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD* (119:1). The Hebrew word translated *blessed* means “happy.” The word *undefiled* refers to a person of integrity. The psalmist

א	Aleph
ב	Beth
ג	Gimel
ד	Daleth
ה	He
ו	Vau
ז	Zain
ח	Cheth
ט	Teth
י	Jod
כ	Caph
ל	Lamed
מ	Mem
נ	Nun
ס	Samech
ע	Ain
פ	Pe
צ	Tzaddi
ק	Koph
ר	Resh
ש	Schin
ת	Tau

begins by saying that blessedness is found in pure living. What does Jesus say about having a pure heart in Matthew 5:8a?

We find **purity** by walking *in the law of the LORD*. This means our lives become pure as we hear God's Word and strive to walk in its teachings.

The psalmist continues in verse two: *Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart*. This phrase reminds us of the beautiful promise found in Jeremiah 29:13. Write that promise below:

Lost people seek happiness in earthly things and relationships. They look for meaning through an education, a spouse, a successful career, social approval, etc. They think when they acquire these things, their hunger for happiness will be satisfied. However, they are looking for satisfaction in empty places. Happiness is found by seeking God—we hear His Word and *keep his testimonies* with all our hearts.

Blessed, or happy, people *also do no iniquity* (119:3a). How do we learn to *do no iniquity*? *We walk in his ways* (119:3b). The Bible teaches our blessedness is connected to our obedience of God's ways. Since our obedience is imperfect, our happiness is also imperfect. As we become more disciplined in godly obedience, we grow in personal happiness.

That is why the psalmist says God wants *us to keep His precepts diligently* (119:4). The word translated *precepts* means mandates, or commandments, given as rules of action. *Precepts* are truth statements about what is right and wrong.

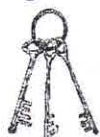
Isaiah provides a detailed method for learning God's precepts. What does he write in Isaiah 28:10?

We learn God's *precepts* just as we learn anything else—lesson by lesson, little by little. While our family lived abroad, we home-schooled our children. We started teaching kindergarten mathematics with 1+1 and 2+2. Next, we added subtraction, multiplication, and division to their foundation of understanding. As the kids approached high school, their understanding

was beyond what my wife and I could teach, so we enrolled them in a public high school. Little by little, their knowledge of mathematical principles grows deeper and deeper.

God designed our minds to understand spiritual truth in a similar way. He does not “download” complete understanding into our brains when we are saved. Instead, He teaches us precept by precept as we study the Bible and obey in faith. Little by little, our knowledge of spiritual principles grows in purity and power.

The first key to a happy life is **purity**, which comes from learning and living according to the Bible. Next is . . .



Key #2: Prayer (119:5-6)

Beginning in verse four, the psalmist moves from preaching **about** God to praying **to** God. The psalmist has just written that God’s Word is to be kept *diligently*, or completely obeyed. None of us can do that. Therefore, what does he pray (119:5)?

This is an honest, heartfelt prayer for help in obeying the Bible. As the man said to Jesus in Mark 9:24: *I believe; help thou mine unbelief*. The psalmist desires to live righteously, but he knows his own tendency to sin.



He continues: *Then I shall not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments* (119:6). As Christians, we acknowledge we fall short of God’s perfect standard. But, as we trust and obey God’s Word, we grow in holiness—a process called “sanctification.” Then, when faced with opposition, we can find comfort in such verses as Proverbs 15:29. Write it below:

There is a third key to a happy life, as we see in the final verses. . .



Key #3: Praise (119:7-8)

There is a rule in geometry—the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Likewise, the shortest distance from problems to praise is prayer. The psalmist makes this connection: *I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments* (119:7).

As we apply God's *judgments* to our problems, we experience the benefits of godly living. Our prayers of supplication are then transformed into prayers of praise. How does David express this truth in Psalm 103:2?

There are many reasons for giving praise to God, but the primary reason is because He is good and the Source of every good thing.

In verse seven, we also discover what must be true in our lives before God will receive our praise. We must have an upright *heart* (119:7a), which means being honest before God. An honest heart stimulates *praise*.

Praise is one of the keys to a happy life because praising God puts our problems into perspective. *Praise* also reminds us God has a divine purpose for every problem He allows in our lives.

The prophet Micah asks what he should bring to the Lord when he bows before Him. Should he come *with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?* (Micah 6:6). Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with 10,000 rivers of oil, or even with the sacrifice of his firstborn child (6:7)? After all these suggestions, Micah tells us what the Lord requires of us when we come before Him. Write Micah 6:8c-e below:



This describes *an uprightness of heart* that leads to *praise*.

The psalmist finally declares: *I will keep thy statutes* (119:8a). However, we must remember we cannot fully obey God's *statutes*, or decrees, unless He enables us to do so. That's why the psalmist adds the last phrase: *O forsake me not utterly* (119:8b). He foresaw the truth of what Jesus would later say: *for without me ye can do nothing* (Jn 15:5e).

God wants us to be happy; that's why He gave us this psalm that reveals **three** keys to a happy life: **purity**, **prayer**, and **praise**.

LESSON 2 . . . How To Live a Pure Life (119:9-16)



NOTES

We are on a “journey” through Psalm 119, learning how to delight in God’s Word every day. In the first lesson, we learned this is the longest chapter in the Bible, with 171 verses to teach us to delight in God’s Word.

The psalmist uses many different synonyms in Psalm 119 for the Word of God: *law, testimonies, commandments, precepts, judgments, statutes*, etc. These synonyms illustrate God’s Word has application in every part of our lives.

In the last lesson, we learned one of the keys to a happy life is purity. In this lesson, we will see a life of purity requires **three** actions. First is . . .

Memorize God’s Word (119:9-11).

Bookshelves are filled with “how to” books on every imaginable topic. One of the most popular searches on the internet is “How do I . . .?” I am amazed at how many people take the time to post videos online showing their expertise (or lack thereof). This much is certain—people want to know how to do things.

Verse nine begins by asking a “how to” question: *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?* The remainder of the section gives us some practical answers. But, before we get to the answers, we do not want to miss something important in the question.

The world says, “Sow your wild oats while you are young and settle down when you get old.” However, this is a destructive lie of the Evil One that leads to needless suffering and regret. God wants us to live an abundant life to the fullest through a lifelong pursuit of purity. According to verse 9a, when should we begin learning to live a pure life?

While God’s ways are the best ways for any stage in life (and it’s never too late to start), it is important to start when we are young.

Regardless of our age, we keep our way pure by *taking heed thereto according to* God’s Word (v. 9b). That leads us to another question: How do we live *according to* God’s Word (verse 10a)?

These verses are a prayer, and prayer is where purity begins. We must seek God by asking Him to help us. We cannot find purity without God's help.

In this fallen world, our hearts are warped by evil desires, such as lust, envy, pride, greed, resentment, and selfishness. If we try to drive out these fallen, natural desires without God's intervention, we make things worse.

In Luke 11:24-25, Jesus describes a man who has an *unclean spirit* go out of him. The man cleans up his life, so the "house" of his heart is clean and in order. However, the evil spirit returns and finds the man's heart cleaned up but still empty. What does Jesus say happens when people fight satanic forces without inviting God's presence into their hearts (Luke 11:26)?

Here is a scientific principle: "**Nature hates a vacuum.**" Jesus uses this story to illustrate that getting rid of evil in our lives is not enough because only emptiness remains. Personal reform alone will only lead to disaster. We must fill our hearts and minds with the Word of God so the power of His Spirit can give us Christlike desires. That's why the Bible teaches in Philippians 2:13: *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

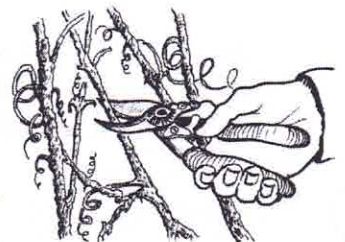
Along with petitioning God for help, we find another secret to having a godly heart. Write your first name in the blanks of this paraphrased version of Psalm 119:11:

"_____ has hidden God's Word in his/her heart, that
_____ might not sin against Him."

The Hebrew word translated *hid*, or stored, means "to reserve." It refers to memorizing God's Word so it is readily available for use. How much of God's Word do you have in reserve for the coming tests in your life? You can be sure God will put you to the test, so you will need His promises stored in your heart.

Jesus also tells His disciples in John 15:3: *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

The word translated *clean* is καθαρός (kath-ar-os') meaning "pure" or "innocent." It is the picture of God's Word pruning away sinful parts of our lives so we can become more and more fruitful. As we store up God's truth in our hearts, there is no more room for the old lies that led us astray. In turn, our lives grow in purity.



In addition, what does Jesus ask God to do to His followers in John 17:17?

The word *sanctify* means “to make holy” or “set apart from sin.” The Word of God empowers us to live pure, fruitful lives, **if** we hide it in our hearts. A great way to understand Psalm 119:11 is to outline it like this:

The best **possession** I have is . . . **God’s Word.**
The best **place** for it is **in my heart.**
The best **purpose** is **that I might not sin.**

Only God’s Word can help us attain and maintain moral purity. Therefore, we must first **memorize God’s Word**, and then . . .

Verbalize God’s Word (119:12-13).

We read in Psalm 119:12: *Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.* We cannot understand God’s Word by ourselves, so we need God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, to be our Teacher. We need the Holy Spirit to help us comprehend the Bible and apply it to our lives. What does Jesus say about the Holy Spirit in John 14:26?

When we study the Bible, we must ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to be our Teacher. The Bible is God’s Word and God says in Isaiah 55:9: *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

When God teaches you, He expects you to tell others. That is why we read in Psalm 119:13a: *with my lips have I declared.* One of the best ways to reinforce what you learn is to **verbalize**—say it aloud. When you tell someone what you have learned, there are two people listening—the person you are talking to and **you**. So, if you want to really learn God’s Word, get busy teaching it to someone else.

To attain and maintain moral purity, **memorize God’s Word, verbalize God’s Word**, and then . . .

Personalize God’s Word (119:14-16).

It is natural to delight in pleasant things that happen to us: a gift, a new job, or a material blessing. To maintain spiritual purity, we must delight in God’s Word—more than we delight in earthly pleasures. God’s Word is our greatest treasure, so we should rejoice in it. My dad, Tommy, had a favorite verse: *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and*

of love, and of a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7). In this paraphrased version of that verse, write your first name in the blank:

“For God has not given _____ a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind (or self-control).”

When Dad first started preaching, he was terrified to speak in front of people. So, he wrote this verse in the flyleaf of his Bible and would read it when he felt afraid. When we **personalize** God’s Word, there is no room left for our fears.

To deeply personalize God’s Word, we must **meditate** on it. How does Psalm 119:15 describe meditating on God’s promises?

The word translated *meditate* (רָעָה, see’-och) means “to ponder” or “reflect deeply.” Meditation is the flipside of worry. If you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. When you worry, you take a negative thought and concentrate on it, thinking about it over and over. To meditate, just use that same process to focus on God’s promises. Fix your eyes on God’s Word, considering it over and over in your mind.

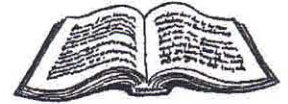
Think on God’s promises during every part of the day and night. Meditation enables us to personalize God’s truth and obey what command in James 1:22a-b?

Living a pure life is possible only when we **memorize God’s Word, verbalize God’s Word, and personalize God’s Word**. As we attain and maintain spiritual purity, we will also experience untold joy, peace, and love in our lives.

What worries are keeping you up at night? God’s Word can filter out those thoughts and replace them with pure, delightful promises.



LESSON 3 . . . When You Feel Overwhelmed (119:17-32)



NOTES

This great Psalm demonstrates the many facets of the Word of God and how to delight in it every day. As the psalmist looks at God's promises from different perspectives, we see changing patterns that enrich our vision of the Bible. Now, we come to verses 17-32, in which we will find **two** truths to remember when we feel overwhelmed. First . . .

God provides for what He requires (119:17-24).

This section begins with a petition to God in verse 17: *Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.* The psalmist does not want to simply survive; he wants a bountiful life. When our lives are bountiful, we can do more than just take care of ourselves. We have enough left over to help other people, both physically and spiritually. Why do we need God's bounty in our lives, according to Ephesians 2:10b?

We cannot fulfill the good works God has prepared for us if we are living in spiritual and physical survival mode. We need God's bountiful resources in our lives to accomplish the work He has prepared for each day. Therefore, the psalmist asks God to open his eyes so he can see the wonders of God's Word (119:18).

Put your first name in this paraphrase of Jesus' words from John 15:5b-d:

"If _____ abides in Me, and I in _____, _____ will bear much fruit. But without Me, _____ can do nothing."

The psalmist continues: *I am a stranger in the earth* (119:19a). A *stranger*, or sojourner, resides **temporarily** in a place. Christians are pilgrims on this fallen earth, preparing for life in eternity. Someone has suggested this acrostic for the Bible:

Basic
Instructions
Before
Leaving
Earth

This world is not our home, so we shouldn't get too comfortable here. That is why the Bible gives us what command in 1 John 2:15a?



We are temporary stewards of the time, talents, and treasures God provides. Also, God will hold us accountable for our stewardship during our sojourn on earth. What we do while we are here impacts our eternity. This is why the psalmist's heart yearns for **eternal** words in this **temporary** world (119:19b-20).

He then goes on to identify two societal currents that will wash us away from God's path if we are not alert. The first current that flows away from God is the *cursed* people mentioned in verse 21.

The word translated *cursed* means "arrogant." The psalmist has seen what God does to prideful people. God turns them away, and they are left stranded with hopeless, worldly ways that lead to destruction. Psalm 9:5a-b puts it bluntly: *Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked*. Then, according to the last phrase of that verse, what happens to the memory of the wicked?

When we walk in God's ways, we can expect conflict and pushback from those who are walking away from God. Those who reject God's Word will reject God's people. Psalm 119:22 gives a description of what the psalmist was experiencing from the lost people around him: *reproach and contempt*. We should expect the same from unbelievers around us.

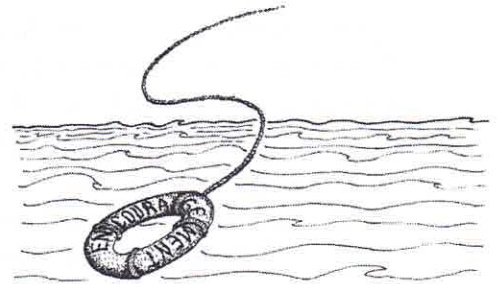
In verse 23, we see a second current pressing against us as we walk by God's Word—the *princes* of the world. Though God is the King above all kings, He does allow fallen, corrupt people to rise into authority over His children in worldly affairs. Jesus himself submitted to pagan rulers who rejected God's ways. Likewise, God's children must submit to ungodly rulers.

It is a mystery to us why God allows this, but this temporary trouble comes with a permanent promise in 1 Peter 4:14a-b. Write that promise below:

That is why Jesus commands us in Luke 6:28: *Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.* He knows we can become overwhelmed with the scorn and oppression of the lost world. So, when we are feeling overwhelmed, we should remember **God provides for what He requires.** The next section of Psalm 119 teaches us where we can gain access to God's provisions. We must remember . . .

The Bible is the storehouse of His provisions (119:25-32).

The passage begins: *My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word* (119:25). Something is overwhelming the psalmist. In his weakness, he is unable to cope with the circumstances. We would say "I'm at the end of my rope" or "I'm at my wit's end." The phrase *quicken me* means "revive me" or "give me the ability to deal with my problems." He needs hope and encouragement. Romans 15:4 begins: *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.* Write the rest of that verse below:



When the world's pressures push us down, the Bible lifts us up with *hope* and *comfort*, or encouragement, as we apply it to our lives.

If you have fished in rivers, you may know that the healthiest part of a river lies just behind the rapids. As the water bounces through rocks and crashes over the falls, it is filled with oxygen and purified. This purified, aerated water becomes a healthy pool below the rapids—a good place to find healthy fish.

In the same way, the healthiest times in our lives are waiting just behind difficulties. As we are bounced through problems and crashed over failures, our souls cleave *unto the dust* (119:25) and our strength *melteeth* (119:28). We confess our weaknesses to God and seek Him through Scripture. He then fills us with His Spirit (Jn 6:63) and purifies us with His Word (Jn 15:3). Finally, our aerated, purified souls are renewed—a good place to find healthy, spiritual fruit.

In Isaiah 58:11 we read: *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones . . .* According to the rest of that verse, what happens to us as the Lord works in us?

When we are overwhelmed, God's Word and His Spirit have the power to fill us with strength and comfort. Paul writes that God comforts us in our trouble, *that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God* (2 Cor. 1:4).

This means we should comfort others with the scriptures and experiences with which God has comforted us. We then become witnesses of the Gospel.

If God provides for what He requires, and the Bible is the storehouse of His provisions, then the petitions of verses 29-32 make perfect sense. How should we feel and act towards God's Word? We should:

- *Remove . . . lying* from us as we learn the truth (v. 29).
- Choose *the way of truth* by observing what God says (v. 30).
- Stick to His *testimonies* so the currents of society do not pull us away and put us to shame (v. 31).
- *Run* in God's ways so our hearts will be full and strong (v. 32).

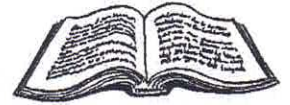
God has good works of eternal significance for us to do every day. We are unfit to do those good works in our own power. Therefore, God provides the supernatural provisions of His Word and His Spirit to lead, protect, comfort, and strengthen us. With His help, we can heed what exhortation in Galatians 6:9?

Perhaps you are drowning in the rough waters of life. If so, confess your weakness to God. Ask Him to strengthen you with His Word and comfort you with His Spirit. He will see you through the temporary tribulation and lead you downstream to the calm, healthy waters.

Perhaps God has just brought you through rough waters and you are in a calm, healthy place. Use this time to minister to others in the same way God ministered to you. Don't be distracted by worldly diversions.

As we just read, *in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*. Amen.

LESSON 4 . . . Being a Student of God's Word (119:33-40)



NOTES

Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem using the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two stanzas with eight verses each. This lesson will examine the fifth stanza, which is headed by the fifth letter in the Hebrew alphabet—*HE*. This section rhythmically reminds us of the importance of being good students of God's Word. We will see at least **three** things to do as we study our Bibles. First . . .

Pray for illumination (119:33-35).

Illumination is the process of shining light to make something visible or understandable. God wants all people to hear and understand His Word. This is why Christians start schools everywhere they take the Gospel. This is also why missionaries give their lives to translate the Bible into other languages. Christians realize basic education is fundamental for people to understand the Bible. In fact, the first universities in the United States were established to educate Christian ministers.

When applying for admission into a university, you may have to answer this question: "Why do you want to attend our university?" In verses 33-35, the psalmist tells us why he wants admission into God's "school." Why does he want to learn God's Law, according to verse 34?

Because of our fallen nature, we don't need anyone to teach us how to sin. But we do need the Scriptures to teach us how to be righteous. As the Bible teaches in Romans 3:10b: *There is none righteous, no, not one.*

This doesn't mean there are no decent people in the world. It does mean we all tend to sin because we are selfish at the core. The psalmist understands this and wants God to teach him to be righteous. So, he asks God to illuminate his mind so he can clearly see God's statutes and law.

List the four ways Scripture profits us, according to 2 Timothy 3:16?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ in _____

One of Satan's powerful lies is "God's way is not fun." The Evil One wants to convince us God's commands lead to a dull, boring life. However, the Bible is the source of deepest delight (119:35). There is temporary

pleasure in sin; otherwise, no one would want to sin. Yet, that short-lived fun gives birth to long-term trouble and regret. Moses could have lived a princely life in Egypt, but he didn't. How does Hebrews 11:25 describe his choice?

Psalm 16:11 gives us the eternal perspective that Satan wants us to forget: *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

To be a good student of God's Word, **pray for illumination** and . . .

Avoid temporary preoccupations (119:36-37).

In these verses, the psalmist mentions **two** kinds of preoccupation:

1. Preoccupation with covetousness. The psalmist prays in 119:36: *Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.* The Hebrew word **בִּצְרָה** (bet-sah'), translated *covetousness*, means "to plunder." This same word is used in 1 Samuel 8:3 to describe the corrupt ways of Samuel's sons.

The truth is **everything** belongs to God. We are short-term stewards and should invest His resources wisely. Everyone will be judged on their earthly stewardship. Faithful stewardship demonstrates our love for God. Jesus plainly states this reality in Matthew 6:24: *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.* Write the final words of that verse below:

The word translated *serve* in that verse means "be enslaved to." The modern form of financial slavery occurs when people borrow money for things such as clothes, cars, and gadgets that quickly lose their value. This brings us to the second preoccupation to avoid . . .

2. Preoccupation with depreciating "do-dads." Depreciation is the loss of value. A "do-dad" is an unnecessary or vain thing. Everything we acquire that is not in accordance with God's Word is a depreciating "do-dad."

King Solomon wrote an entire "research paper" on the acquisition of these vain things. We know his writing as the book of Ecclesiastes. After getting all the gear, browsing all the books, marrying all the maidens, constructing



all the castles, and experiencing all the excesses, the wisest person in the world (other than Jesus Christ) comes to a conclusion. What does he decide, according to Ecclesiastes 12:13c-d?

To be a good student of God's Word, **pray for illumination** of eternal truth, **avoid temporary preoccupations** with selfish gain and depreciating "do-dads," and finally. . .

Have the right aspiration (119:38-40).

Because of severe opposition from the world, the psalmist prays in verse 38a: *Stablish thy word unto thy servant*. The word translated *thy word* is אֶמְרָתְךָ (im-raw'-tayka). The psalmist is not referring to a particular promise but to all of God's Word. God will confirm all of His promises.

That is why progress in God's "school" requires us to increase our understanding of God's Word. Eternal truth is not served buffet-style, where we can pick and choose. In Matthew 4, Jesus overturns Satan's temptations by quoting the Eternal Truth of God. Satan knows Jesus is hungry and dares Him to turn stones into bread. Jesus replies by quoting the last phrase of Deuteronomy 8:3. Write below what Jesus says in Matthew 4:4b-c:



The psalmist states in verse 38b that we will fear God when He confirms His promises. Why is that true? The first chapter of *Revelation* records the apostle John's personal encounter with the awesome, resurrected King Jesus coming to judge the world. What is John's reaction (Revelation 1:17a)?

Jesus then tells the terrified John: *Fear not; I am the first and the last* (Rev. 1:17b).

If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you should be absolutely terrified of God's coming judgment. However, if you have fallen at Jesus' feet and made Him your Savior and Lord, you no longer need to be afraid of judgment. You can live with the promise we find in Hebrews 4:16: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

When we approach God in the name of Jesus, we can come to *the throne of grace* with confidence, but we should never lose our sense of reverence and fear. The fear of God's justice heightens our love and joy as we experience His mercy and grace. We must never forget God is our awesome, majestic, holy God, who is great in power and deserves our reverent worship.

As with any school, there is the potential of dropping out of God's "school." For the Christian, this is called "backsliding." We are all tempted to give in to the ridicule and scorn of the world. No one likes to be disrespected or left out by society. That is probably what is meant by the prayer in Psalm 119:39: *Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.*

In reality, being friends with Jesus will make us enemies with the world. Jesus promises the world will treat His disciples the way it treated Him. The apostle Paul echoes this promise in 2 Timothy 3:12. Personalize this verse below:

In verse 40, the psalmist concludes the stanza with two wonderful lines: *Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.*

Wherever you go on this earth, if you listen carefully, you will hear everyone asking the same question. "What is wrong with this world?" If you listen even more closely, you will hear each person asking, "What is wrong with me?" The psalmist has given us the answer to these universal questions.

In our fallen state, we are spiritually dead people, separated from God. We long for the truth and purpose of our Creator. When we receive Christ, we are born again, and that separation is bridged. We can walk out of the darkness and into the light of God's eternal truth.

As we walk in His light, we fight the good fight until one day we can pray what is written in Psalm 116:8. Write that prayer below:

To be a good student of God's Word: **pray for illumination, avoid temporary preoccupations, and have the right aspiration.**

LESSON 5 . . . Growing Your Relationship with God (119:41-64)



NOTES

The next twenty-four verses of Psalm 119 reveal the purpose of Bible study is **not** to fill our heads with facts. Instead, the ultimate purpose of Scripture is to change our lives through faithful obedience to what we learn. Our relationship with God grows as we learn His Word and obey it in faith. The rhythm of the Christian life is: **hear** God's Word, **be stirred** by His Spirit, **obey** in faith, and **experience** God's presence.

We cannot have a meaningful, growing relationship with our Creator if we do not delight in His Word. Let's see the actions required of us to have a growing relationship with God through His Word. First . . .

Contemplate God's love (119:41-48).

Verse 41 begins: *Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.* The word *mercies* refers to God's love. This is the first time God's *mercies*, or love, is mentioned in this chapter. It is connected to two things—God's promises and God's salvation. God's love for us is not discerned with shifting emotions. We know He loves us by hearing His words and seeing His actions. According to Romans 5:8b-c, how does God prove His love for us?



As we grow in our knowledge and obedience, God's loving promises become "living and active." As a result, we have what is mentioned in verse 42: I am able to *answer him that reproacheth me*. God does not call us to be **philosophers** about His truth in a lost world. He commands us to be **witnesses** of what we know and experience in our relationship with Him.

In 1 Peter 3:15b, Peter instructs us to *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. However, what do we read in the rest of that verse?

In verse 45, the psalmist describes the result of being God's faithful witness: *And I will walk at liberty*. The word translated *liberty* is רָחֵב (raw'hawb) and means broad or wide. In Genesis 26, Isaac uses this same word (*Rehoboth*) as a name for a water well (26:22a-b). How does Isaac describe this "wide place" to which God has led them (26:22c-d)?

Just like Isaac and the psalmist, we live in a world filled with strife and sin. In the midst of this, God makes a place for us to be fruitful. And from that place of *liberty*, we can appreciate what the psalmist writes in verse 48: *My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved.*

To grow your relationship with God through His Word, **contemplate God's love**, and . . .

Celebrate God's comfort (119:49-56).

This stanza celebrates the comfort of knowing God's Word. It begins: *Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope* (v. 49). A relationship with our Creator through the Bible brings us hope in any circumstance. When the waves of life's difficult storms toss us to and fro, we can cling to the eternal stability of God's promises.

There is a Bible promise for every problem we encounter. One is Isaiah 26:3. Personalize this promise by writing your first name in each of the blanks and reading it aloud.

Thou wilt keep _____ in perfect peace, because _____'s mind is stayed on thee: because _____ trusteth in thee.

A seemingly hopeless situation afflicted this psalmist. Yet, meditating on God's promises brings him *hope* (v. 49), *comfort* (vv. 50 and 52), *life* (v. 50), and *songs* (v. 54). What a wonderful resource God has given us for times of trouble!

This section concludes with a revealing statement in verse 56: *This I had, because I kept thy precepts.* As we experience God's steadfast love for us, we begin to see the promises themselves as our greatest treasure. We will be like the wise man Jesus talks about in Matthew 7:24-25. Jesus says everyone who hears and obeys His Word will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The winds and floods beat on the house. However, what happens, according to Matthew 7:25c?



We often first come to Jesus for what we can get from Him—harmony in the home, salvation from sin, entry into eternity, strength for success, etc. Then, at some point, God takes us through a lonely, desperate wilderness. In that place, many shallow Christians will walk away from Him. That happens in John 6:66. Then, Jesus asks the twelve disciples: *Will ye also go away?* (6:67). What is Simon Peter's answer (6:68)?

Several years ago, God led my wife into a lonely wilderness when our daughter was stillborn. Someone asked us if the pain and grief caused us to doubt God's goodness. I will never forget my wife's tearful reply: "There is nowhere I can go but to Jesus." Amen!

The greatest sources of comfort we have are God's eternal promises and the presence of His Spirit. No earthly thing can compare.

To grow in our relationship with God through His Word, **contemplate God's love, celebrate God's comfort**, and . . .

Concentrate on God's presence (119:57-64).

As we just mentioned, when God strips us of earthly blessings, we realize we need His presence more than anything else. What does the psalmist declare in verse 57?

The word *portion* means "allotment" or "inheritance." God's presence is our great inheritance.

Every earthly blessing is temporary. Even the supernatural resurrection of Jesus' dear friend Lazarus was temporary (Jn 11). He eventually became ill again and died. It is the same for every person who receives physical healing in this life. Therefore, we must seek the Healer and not the healing. The eternal joy of the Lord does not come through temporary blessings in this life.

We read in verse 58a: *I intreated thy favour with my whole heart*. Joy is found when we seek God with **all** our hearts.

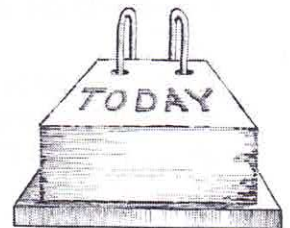
The first step in drawing near to God is to examine the direction of our lives. In verse 59a, the psalmist declares that when he begins to think on God's ways, something happens. What is it (119:59b)?

This is often called "repentance." Repentance is the realization you are in the wrong place and going the wrong direction.

I love hiking and climbing in the Wichita Mountains of Oklahoma. One fall morning, I set out to walk a ten-mile loop and return to my campsite by sunset. I had a wonderful time exploring and taking pictures along the trail. As the evening approached, I stopped at a sign marked "French Lake." I did not remember this lake being on my planned route. So, I pulled out my map and searched for French Lake. My heart sank when I found it. The map showed me I was in the wrong place and headed the wrong direction.

When we hear the Gospel, we have a similar, heart-sinking experience. God's Word shows us we are in the wrong place and headed the wrong direction. Now, a decision must be made. Do we accept the truth of God's "Map" and turn to go in the right direction (repentance)? Or, do we reject the truth of the "Map" and stay our own course? The psalmist's decision is: *I turned my feet unto thy testimonies* (119:59b).

That evening on the trail I **immediately** turned around to follow the right path to my campsite. It was getting dark, so there was no time to lose. We hear the same sentiment in the psalmist's voice in verse 60. He prays: *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*. When the light of God's Word reveals we have wandered off course, we should make those changes immediately, without *delay*. How is this truth expressed in Hebrews 3:15b-c?



In the final verses of this stanza of Psalm 119, we see a repeated refrain. As the psalmist tries to live faithful to God's Word, those opposing God attempt to discourage and trip him up (v. 61). However, as he presses onward in God's way, he finds other faithful companions (v. 63).

Every time God's people plan a gathering, Satan and the lost world conspire to keep us apart. In verse 61, the psalmist writes: the *bands of the wicked have robbed me*, which means that ungodly forces are surrounding the psalmist. Those evil forces do not want God's people to gather into God's presence for worship and good work.

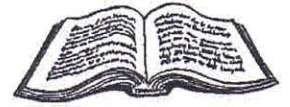
Satan probably thinks, "If I can just keep them up late on Saturday night with entertainment, or pressure them with social commitments, or get them signed up for a sports league, or make them work long hours into exhaustion, or get their lost friends to make fun of them, or hook them on video games . . . then they may not gather with other Christians to be encouraged and equipped. **Satan's most effective tactic is to distract and discourage.**

Let's push through these schemes with renewed hearts, longing to grow in our relationship to God our Father and fellowship with other believers.

How does the psalmist close this section (119:64)?

To grow in our relationship with God through His Word, **contemplate God's love, celebrate God's comfort, and concentrate on God's presence.**

LESSON 6 . . . Advancing Good Through Adversity (119:65-88)



NOTES

We are continuing to learn how to delight in God's Word as we examine Psalm 119. In this lesson, we will briefly look at the next three stanzas, headed with the Hebrew letters *TETH*, *JOD*, and *CAPH*. Each stanza reflects on a different way God advances good through adversity. The Bible promises we will have problems, but God also promises not to leave us without the resources we need to overcome them. In addition, God uses His sovereign hand to advance His good and perfect will through those adversities.

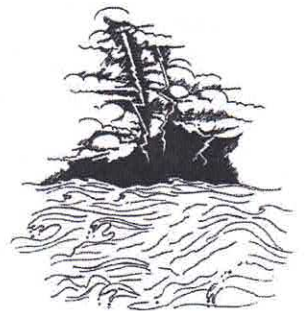
The first way God advances good through adversity is by . . .

Producing Character in Us (119:65-72)

The psalmist sets the tone for the coming section by writing: *Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word* (119:65). None of the psalmist's painful adversity has contradicted God's promises. Quite the opposite, the adversity has advanced his faith and understanding of God's Word.

In verse 66, he goes on to ask God to teach him more and more. Then, he tells us why in verse 67: *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word*. This is a prayer of testimony and confession by the writer. Sometimes God uses affliction to get us back on course when we stray from His Word.

Like the prophet Jonah in the Old Testament, we sometimes get off course and find ourselves in a storm. If we had simply obeyed God's Word, we would have avoided the problem. When we disobey, God disciplines us because He is our loving Father. What happens to Jonah after his affliction in the sea (Jonah 3:1a)?



God does not write off His prophet. He uses the affliction to train Jonah's heart for obedience. God is good all the time, even in our adversity. His desire is that none should perish and the saved would walk in obedience.

In verse 69, the psalmist confesses a particularly painful type of affliction: *The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart*. Few things injure a person more than being falsely accused of doing wrong. An arrogant person spreading hurtful lies can smear someone's good reputation that has taken years to build.

In Proverbs 6:16-19, we find a list of seven things that are an abomination to God. What is the one listed in Proverbs 6:19a?

As painful as the afflictions of his life have been, the psalmist concludes in verse 71: *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

This same eternal truth is expressed in Romans 5:3-5 by the apostle Paul, who suffered afflictions of many kinds during his ministry. He reasons that we should rejoice in our sufferings because it sparks a godly process called “sanctification.” Read those verses and fill in the blanks below.

Tribulation produces _____;

Patience produces _____;

Experience produces _____; and

Hope in God’s love will not disappoint!

So, God advances good through adversity by **producing character in us** and also by . . .

Promoting Faithfulness in Those Around Us (119:73-80)

This section begins by addressing a universal question: What is the purpose of life? The psalmist points us to the answer in verse 73: *Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.* The One who created us is the only one who can tell us the purpose for our existence.

When we were being formed in our mother’s womb, God joined twenty-three chromosomes from each parent to fashion a unique mix of personality, gifts, intellect, desires, talents, etc. that matches us perfectly to His purpose. The Bible is our “user manual” for living according to His purpose.

In the book of Genesis, we read how Jacob’s son Joseph works hard to follow God’s ways. In the process, he is unjustly sold into slavery, falsely accused of assault, thrown into prison, and separated from his family for decades in a foreign country. After being reunited, Joseph tells his brothers why all these things happened. What is the purpose (Genesis 45:5b)?



The psalmist's prayer parallels God's advancement of good through the adversities of Joseph. God's *merciful kindness* is shown to Joseph (verse 76). God's *tender mercies* are displayed to everyone (v. 77). The *proud* people who sinned, his brothers and Potiphar's wife, are put to shame (v. 78). And, countless people through the ages have looked to Joseph's story as proof of God's faithfulness (v. 79). God continues to promote faithfulness through the afflictions of Joseph even today.

Joseph had to wait many years to see how God advanced good through his unjust afflictions. He endured many lonely nights, feeling forgotten by the God of his fathers. We should not expect to be spared this kind of experience in our lives as well. When life's unfair afflictions are piling up and we wonder why God is delaying His promise, we should pray the prayer this psalmist prays in 119:80. Write it below:

Almighty God advances good through our adversity by **producing character in us, promoting faithfulness in those around us**, and . . .

Projecting light into a dark world (119:81-88)

When we are saved, we receive three wonderful gifts: forgiveness for every sin, a purpose for everyday living, and an eternal home in heaven. These gifts empower us with hope and perseverance as we wait on the Lord. In verses 81-82, the psalmist expresses what it feels like to wait on the Lord: *My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.* ⁽⁸²⁾ *Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?"*

Though he knows God's promises, the psalmist is still confused and weary in his affliction. He feels like a *bottle*, or wineskin, being ruined by smoke (v. 83a), unable to fulfill its intended purpose. He longs to be removed from the corrosive circumstances and restored to fruitfulness.

Like Joseph, some people get to see how God advances good through their affliction in their own lifetimes. Other faithful people experience affliction and never see good come from it until they arrive in heaven.

Let's look at John the Baptist. He has a legendary, miraculous birth. He is the older cousin of Jesus. Crowds of people flock to hear his preaching and respond with repentance. He never seeks riches nor worldly comforts. He is feared by the unrighteous rulers and respected by the God-seekers. What does Jesus say about him in Matthew 11:11a?

Just like the psalmist, John the Baptist knows the scriptures well. Yet, in the final months of John's life, he is imprisoned and loses his public ministry. At the whim of a corrupt ruler, he is afflicted in a way he does not expect. John has prepared the way for the Lamb of God, but now he feels forgotten. He is confused and second-guesses his own prophetic words. He feels like a wineskin rotting in the smoke of a lonely prison.

John must have prayed a prayer just like Psalm 119:86b: *they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me*. Then, one night the guards come and execute him. His head is served on a platter so an evil ruler would not be embarrassed at his drunken party. Where is the good in that? I don't know.



Like Joseph, sometimes we get to see how God uses our affliction for good. However, like John the Baptist, sometimes we suffer, or watch others agonize, and are left wondering with no clear answer. In Hebrews 11, we read about both types of experiences. In that passage, we learn that as sojourners in this fallen world, we should not feel welcome here. How does Hebrews 11:16a describe the mindset of the suffering sojourners who died?

This verse concludes: *wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city* (Heb. 11:16b-c).

Verse 88 of Psalm 119 gives us a "model" prayer for every faithful Christian in every situation: *Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth*. This prayer will be fully consummated only when we reach our final home prepared by Jesus. There we will see God's final advancement of good from our affliction.

Until our faith becomes sight, let's remember the beautiful prayer Paul prayed for the church in Colossians 1:9-14. What does Paul ask in verse eleven?

We all need to ask God to strengthen us as we walk through adversity, so we can joyfully shine His light into a dark world.

God advances good through adversity by **producing character in us, promoting faithfulness in those around us, and projecting light into a dark world.**

LESSON 7 . . . Why You Can Trust the Bible (119:89-96)



NOTES

It takes **less** faith to believe the Bible is true today than it did 100 years ago. Many archeological discoveries have been made in the past century that confirm the reliability of the Bible. Practically 100% of serious scholars acknowledge that the Bible we have is authentic. No informed person today can say, “I just don’t believe the Bible we have today is the same as the original documents the early Christians held.” The evidence clearly says there are no significant differences between today’s Bible and the Scriptures in the early church.

However, this doesn’t mean we need less faith to **understand** the Holy Scriptures today. According to 1 Corinthians 13:12a, why do we still need faith to understand God’s Word?

In this eight-verse stanza, the psalmist focuses on the stability and reliability of God’s Word. We can see there are at least **three** reasons to have confidence in the promises and precepts of the Bible. The first is . . .

The Permanence of God’s Word (119:89-91)

God is immutable, which means unchanging. If you don’t like what you’re hearing on the TV, you can hit the mute button and change its output. However, God’s Word cannot be muted or changed. How does verse 89 state this truth?



When walking through unfamiliar territory, we must have landmarks to stay oriented. A landmark is an unchanging reference point. When I lead people on backpacking trips, we always begin the day by orienting ourselves to the landmarks on the map—rivers, mountains, roads, etc. We use these unchanging landmarks to make good routing decisions along the way. Without landmarks, we would not be able to navigate the terrain. We would be hopelessly disoriented.

The psalmist observes the stability of creation in verse 90: *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.* God’s precepts for living are fixed—like landmarks of creation. So, if we begin our day by reminding ourselves of God’s unchanging laws for living, then we can make good decisions as we navigate life. Without God’s unchanging precepts for living, we will be hopelessly disoriented.

God's Word is full of beautiful "mountains" and "rivers" we can use to navigate our earthly lives with confidence. How does Jesus explain the permanence of God's Word in Matthew 5:18?

Jesus is referring to the smallest parts of the Hebrew alphabet. It would be like an English speaker saying, "Not a dot of an 'i' or a cross of a 't' will change." My systematic theology textbook explains it like this: Scripture is authoritative, clear, necessary, and sufficient. All these are different ways of saying the same thing—God's Word is permanent and reliable.

You can trust the Bible because of the **permanence of God's Word** and . .

The Power of God's Word (119:92-95)

The psalmist begins this stanza by writing about the enduring quality of God's Word. Now, he writes about three ways God's eternal Word gives us His power.

1. God's Word sustains us. We read in verse 92: *Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.* In other words, during times of severe adversity, God's Word preserved him and helped him avoid disaster. Like a ship's rudder in a terrible storm, the Law of God keeps us from crashing onto dangerous rocks and reefs.

When adversity arrives, we need to review, cling to, and even delight in the promises of God. Our "house" can then withstand the storms of life (Mt 7:24).

2. God's Word renews us. That's why the psalmist writes in 119:93: *I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.* The word translated *quicken* (קָיָה, kah-yah') means "to revive" or "restore."

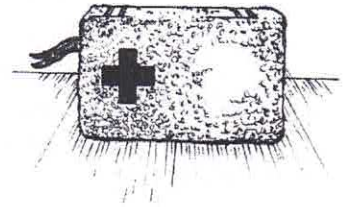
We find spiritual renewal as we study the Word of God and are comforted by the Holy Spirit. The cooperation of God's Word and God's Spirit renews our souls. We experience the power of God most vividly when we rely on His promises during times of adversity.

The reason is found in Hebrews 4:12a. Write it below:

The Greek word translated *powerful* is ἐνεργής (en-er-geys') and means "energizing" or "empowering." As we live according to God's promises,

we are energized for the good works God puts in our path. So, God's Word **sustains us, renews us**, and . . .

3. God's Word rescues us. We read in 119:94: *I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.* He is not asking to be saved from his sins because he writes *I am thine*. He is praying to be saved from the potentially devastating effects of adversity. It is a prayer for deliverance as he is walking in obedience to God's *precepts*.



The psalmist is being persecuted by the people around him (v. 95). He is feeling the pressure to join in the ways of the ungodly. The world promises us if we just compromise a little, our lives will be better. The God-haters tell us, "Join in on our gossip or cheating or filthy talk or inappropriate movies or substance abuse or sexual misconduct, and your life will be better. And, if you don't go along with us, we will make your life very difficult."

King Saul finds himself in this sort of situation in 1 Samuel 15. He knows what God has commanded. However, because Saul fears the people, he disobeys the Lord's commandment (15:24). What is the consequence of his joining the sinful ways of the ungodly around him (15:26b)?

In times of adversity, our faith is tested. The world promises us we will suffer if we don't go along in their sin. However, as we resist these lies and obey God's commands, we see God come to our rescue.

You can trust the Bible because of the **permanence of God's Word**, the **power of God's Word**, and . . .

The Perfection of God's Word (119:96)

The final verse is a summary of this stanza: *I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

The Hebrew word, תִּקְלָה (tik-lah'), is translated *perfection*. Something is considered perfect when it is fully completed. In the Old Testament, this same word is used to describe the completion of speaking, eating, drinking, harvesting, and building projects. In 2 Chronicles 8:16, this word is used to describe the completion of something very important. What is it?

When people looked upon the temple Solomon had built for God, they thought it would stand forever. It was the most spectacular building they

had ever seen. Though that building stood for many years, eventually it was destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed again.

The psalmist understands all worldly perfection eventually erodes away. However, God's heavenly commandments have no limit and exceed all earthly perfection (v. 96). How does Isaiah record this same reality in Isaiah 40:8?



Second Peter 3:12 prophesizes that when Jesus comes like a thief in the night, the heavens and heavenly bodies will be dissolved and melt. Then, what do we read in verse 13?

Everything perfected in this temporary world has its limits or will end, but God's promises will stand forever. As Jesus says in Matthew 24:35: *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

You can trust the Bible, and even delight in it, because of the **permanence of God's Word**, the **power of God's Word**, and the **perfection of God's Word**.

LESSON 8 . . . Finding Your First Love (119:97-104)



NOTES

Have you ever seen people who have just found the “love of their life?” They are so happy they act silly. They try to stay close to their loved one, fix their eyes on them, and delight in every word that is said. This is the kind of language the psalmist uses to describe his feelings in the first part of verse 97: *Oh how I love thy law!* He delights in God’s Word.

What does he write in the second part of that verse?

The psalmist has come to appreciate the value of God’s Word so much he cannot take his eyes off it. He can’t get its truth out of his mind. This is not simply a short-term infatuation; it is a long-term, loving commitment.

In the next verses, we will find **five** reasons God’s Word should be the first love of our lives. The first reason is . . .

It makes us wise (119:98-100).

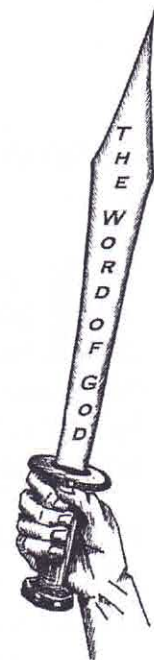
One effect of extensive daily meditation on God’s Word is found in verse 98: *Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.* We live in a world moving fast with information and facts. Yet, the ability to make good decisions lags far behind. Broken families are at an all-time high. Substance abuse and personal debt surround us. However, if we move closer to God’s ways and words, we will move farther away from this foolishness.

Our redemptive journey begins with hearing the Gospel, which brings a foundational wisdom into our lives. How does the apostle Paul describe the beginning of wisdom in 2 Timothy 3:15?

The process of becoming wise begins with hearing the *holy scriptures* and realizing you are separated from the Truth of God. God is the Source of wisdom, so we must be connected to Him to make good decisions. God has preserved His truth for us in a book for thousands of years. He keeps this resource available so we can filter out the foolishness of this world from our thinking.

The wisdom of God is a two-sided sword, cutting through foolishness in every direction. As good Christian soldiers, we should keep this sword ready in every circumstance. There will not be one day in this life when we will not need to use the Sword of the Spirit to cut through the deceit and foolishness of this world.

We must use this Sword at school, at work, at home, and at church. We see two examples of this in verses 99 and 100: *I have more understanding than all my teachers . . . I understand more than the ancients*. Every teaching we hear must be measured by God's revelation of truth, regardless of the teacher's status or education level. What command do we have in 1 John 4:1a-b?



The word translated *understanding* in 119:99 is שָׂקָל (saw-kal'). It refers to right action resulting from right knowledge. We might call it prudence. God's Word, applied in God's way, is the Christian's work that bears much fruit.

God's Word should be our first love because **it makes us wise** and . . .

It keeps us holy (119:101).

What does the psalmist write next (v. 101)?

God's Word keeps us on the path of righteousness. It keeps us oriented as we walk through confusing circumstances.

Few experiences disturb me more than being disoriented in unfamiliar terrain. On my first night as a college intern in Washington D.C., I went exploring on the underground train system. I decided to watch a late movie and planned to retrace my steps back to the dormitory on the train. After the movie, I returned to the station to discover it had just closed. I exited the station onto a mysterious, dark street.

I was not carrying a phone, a compass, or a map. Though I knew my destination, I had no idea which way was north or south. My heart pounded as I stood paralyzed on that dark sidewalk with my eyes racing up and down the street for anything familiar. My eyes finally came to rest on a large map at the entrance of the station behind me. I now knew the direction to go. The knowledge on that map guided the rest of my journey.

Sometimes the “train” of life drops us off in unfamiliar terrain, so we don’t know which way to go. God’s promises and precepts are a map—ready and able to show us the way through the confusion. Though the situation is a mystery to us, we can be sure God knows exactly where we are. And, He will guide us on our journey to our heavenly home.

King David had many strange detours during his life. However, what does he remember in Psalm 23:3b?

We grow in our love for God’s laws as they lead us safely on His holy path. The Word of God should be our first love because **it makes us wise, it keeps us holy**, and . . .

It deepens our relationship with our Father (119:102).

Whatever God speaks happens. The creation story in Genesis 1 is a clear example of this. God says, *Let there be light: and there was light* (1:3). In John 21, we read that seasoned fishermen had not caught a single fish all night. Then, Jesus says, *Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find* (Jn 21:6). They then catch so many fish they cannot pull the nets into the boat. When we hear God’s Word and respond in faith, we grow closer to Him.



In Matthew 6, Jesus says we should not be primarily concerned about money, food, clothes, and such. Then, He speaks a clear promise in Matthew 6:33. What does He say?

These words are as effective as *Let there be light* and *Cast the net on the right side*. And, as we hear and obey these powerful words spoken directly to us by God, we will love Him more and more.

Another reason God’s Word should be our first love is . . .

It is sweet, soul food (119:103).

The psalmist writes in verse 103: *How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* My favorite dessert is vanilla ice cream with pecans tossed on top. I ask my wife not to buy the large tubs of ice cream because I will eat it until I feel sick at my stomach. How I wish

my spiritual taste buds would learn to crave God's testimonies even more than my physical taste buds crave ice cream!

Unlike my experience with feasting on ice cream, we will never regret feasting on God's Truth. Spiritually speaking, God's Word has the taste of ice cream and the nutrition of spinach.

We continually grow in our love for God's Word because **it makes us wise, it keeps us holy, it deepens our relationship with our Father, it is sweet, soul food, and finally . . .**

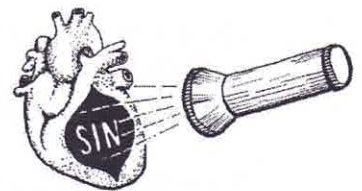
It guides our hatred of sin (119:104).

How is this truth expressed in verse 104?

We are rightly told to "hate the sin and love the sinner." A mother cannot love her child if she doesn't hate those things that would destroy her child. I knew a mother whose two daughters were lured into substance abuse as teenagers. Both of their lives were wrecked with the misery of addiction. Their mother hates the sin of substance abuse because it destroyed the lives of the daughters she loved. As she told me the painful stories, I could see her gentle face grow red with righteous hatred.

Likewise, God hates sin because it destroys the people He loves. In the end, He will pour out His wrath on the lost because they love sin more than His truth and grace. According to Jesus' words in John 3:20, why do people hate God's Word?

Because of our fallen nature, we hate truth that exposes our sins. When God raises us up from the mire of sin, we realize we have been feasting on slop. From that godly perspective, we learn to hate sin as we watch it destroy the people God loves.



God's Word should be our first love because:

It makes us wise.

It keeps us holy.

It deepens our relationship with our Father.

It is sweet, soul food.

It guides our hatred of sin.

LESSON 9 . . . Walking in the Light of the Word (119:105-112)



NOTES

As we continue our journey through Psalm 119, we are discovering more and more reasons to delight in God's Word. This stanza begins with one of the most famous verses of the chapter. It magnifies the value of God's Word in our lives: *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path* (v. 105). Let's learn why we can delight in The Light.

Christians have an immense advantage over lost people. We have God's Truth to light our way. People who live according to the Bible are not wondering and wandering in this life. **God's Word gives us a path, a direction, a lifestyle, and a reason for living.** These spiritual resources are inaccessible to the lost world.

Jesus shines the light of truth even brighter when He becomes the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14). He shows us the Bible is not just a book of philosophy or "pie in the sky" ideals; it is a nitty-gritty guidebook for enlightened living. In John 8:12a, Jesus declares: *I am the light of the world*. Then, He gives us what promise in the rest of that verse?

If we follow Him, we won't walk in darkness. Plus, Jesus tells us we will ourselves become *the light of the world*, placed on a hill for a dark world to see (Mt 5:14).

In this stanza of Psalm 119, we will see the powerful effects of God's Light for those who hold it fast. The first effect of walking in the light is . . .

We will have light for our decisions (119:106).

Every day we must make hundreds of decisions of every sort and scale. Those decisions lead to commitments that define the direction of our day. God gives us *righteous judgments* (v. 106) that guide our decision-making process. These *judgments* shine light on wrong commitments to avoid and right commitments to accept. This is what the Bible calls holy living. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:7, why did God call each one of us?

Only with the light of God's *righteous judgments* can we navigate through the foggy morality of this world. God's eternal Word, as revealed by God's

eternal Spirit, illuminates God's eternal way for all who will receive it. God does not tell us the *times or the seasons* He *hath put in his own power* (Acts 1:7). However, He does give us good, sufficient wisdom for each day. Like the psalmist, we must commit to living according to God's *righteous judgments* until the coming of the day of the Lord.

The second effect of walking in the light of God's Word is . . .

We will have light for our difficulty (119:107).

The psalmist begins verse 107a: *I am afflicted very much*. In previous verses, we learned evil people were surrounding the psalmist with false accusations, threats, and oppression. We have also read even the princes in authority over him were working against God's servants. The weightiness of discouragement is pressing onto the psalmist's shoulders. So, he prays, *quicken me, O LORD, according unto thy word* (v. 107b).

Scripture clearly teaches God allows His people to suffer in this fallen world for the accomplishing of God's will. Every Christian should expect God will lead them into suffering that is confusing and difficult. What does God command Abraham in Genesis 22:2?

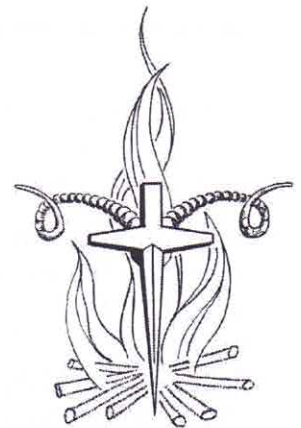
Abraham has no idea God is foreshadowing the coming sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world over 1,000 years later on the same mountain. Though God is leading him into a painful and confusing situation, Abraham obeys with faith, knowing *God will provide* (Gen. 22:8). God's promises are a powerful light, leading us through confusing difficulty.

As we walk in the light of God's Word, we will have **light for our decisions, light for our difficulty**, and. . .

We will have light for our devotion (119:108).

We devote ourselves to what we find praiseworthy. The psalmist is devoted to God's Word because of its unsurpassed value in his life. This delight brings *freewill offerings of my mouth*—songs to God (119:108a). As we walk in the light of God's Word, our appreciation for our Lord grows. In turn, thankfulness and praise flow freely from our hearts.

In addition to *freewill offerings* of praise, we learn from 2 Corinthians 9:7 each Christian must give monetarily to the work of the Lord as they decide in their hearts. Then, what does the last phrase of that verse tell us?



Our tithes, offerings, and songs become the manifestation of that *cheerful* heart.

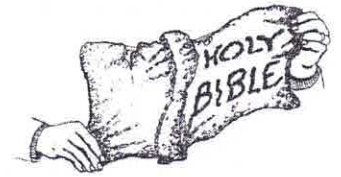
Another effect of walking in the light of God's Word is . . .

We will have light for our dangers (119:109-110).

The psalmist begins this verse with a Hebrew saying: *My soul is continually in my hand* (v. 109). In 1 Samuel 19:5, we read David *put his life in his hand* when he fought Goliath. The point is the psalmist feels *continually* in danger from the worldly forces around him.

God's people are continually in danger, whether we recognize it or not. There are both physical and spiritual dangers. It is often the sneaky spiritual dangers that lead us astray.

Another danger is false teachers. In 2 Peter 3:17b, the apostle Peter warns us about following people who twist the scripture. What does he warn?



God's Word is a light that gives us wisdom when dangerous temptations and dangerous teachings come near. When the wicked have *laid a snare* for us, we can find safety in God's *precepts* (119:110).

Walking in the light of God's Word gives us **light for our decisions, light for our difficulty, light for our devotion, light for our dangers**, and finally . . .

We will have light for our delight (119:111-112).

The main purpose of *Journey Through Psalm 119* is we will deepen our delight in God's Word. Verse 111 reads: *God's testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever*. In the Old Testament, a person's most valued heritage, or inheritance, was their family's land. They built homes on the land, grew crops on the land, grazed livestock on the land, dug wells on the land, and passed the land on to their children and grandchildren.

However, the psalmist says God's *testimonies* are his **eternal** heritage and are even more valuable than the Promised Land. How does the apostle Paul express this same delight in Philippians 3:8a?

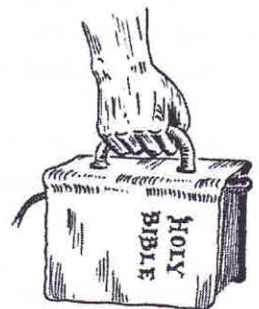
God's Truth is our greatest source of joy and delight. In the previous lesson, we discovered some of the reasons for this: it makes us wise; it keeps us holy; it deepens our relationship with our Father; it is sweet, soul food; and it guides our hatred of sin. No earthly inheritance can compare in value to what God has given us in the Bible. This is why we read in verse 111b: *for they are the rejoicing of my heart.*

However, the psalmist says in verse 112 we must incline our hearts to *perform* God's *statutes*. This means every day will be a personal struggle against our natural inclinations. What does the Bible teach about the fallen state of our hearts? Write Jeremiah 17:9 below:

This truth is echoed in Proverbs 14:12: *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

The Bible shines light on both the **external** dangers of the world and the **internal** dangers of our own fallen hearts. With these sinful realities exposed, we can protect ourselves from them. There is an old saying, "The only dangerous snake is the one you don't see." God's Word shines a light on the "snakes" in our lives so we can avoid them or destroy them.

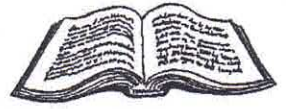
As the Scriptures expose these external and internal dangers, what are we able to do, according to 2 Timothy 2:15?



We should delight in God's Word, knowing it can protect us from the spiritual dangers that would destroy us from the inside out.

If we learn and walk in the light of God's Word, we will find . . .

**light for our decisions,
light for our difficulty,
light for our devotion,
light for our dangers, and
light for our delight.**



LESSON 10 . . . How To Experience Peace of Mind (119:113-128)

NOTES

Delighting in God's Word is a spiritual, emotional, and logical experience. God created us with each of these dimensions so we can relate to Him more fully. This lesson explores the **practical** and **logical** delight we can find in God's Word as truth.

Our minds are designed to enjoy learning new things and solving problems. Recently, a small stone fell into my boot while I was hiking through a dry creek bed. I kept walking for a while, but I could not fully enjoy the experience with that pebble scratching my heel. Finally, I sat down, unlaced my boot, and dumped the pebble on the trail. With a sigh of relief, I resumed my peaceful walk, annoyance-free.

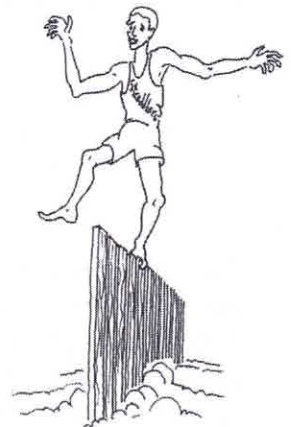
An unresolved problem irritates our minds like that pebble in my boot. We can be walking through our day, but that problem irritates the "heel" of our mind. Eventually, we must stop and deal with the irritation. God's Word shows us how to dump these annoying, debilitating "pebbles" from our minds. In this way, we can obey the command in 1 Peter 5:7. Personalize and paraphrase this verse below:

These next two stanzas will show us **four** ways to experience **peace of mind** as we think about and delight in God's Word. The first is . . .

Be single-minded (119:113-117).

The psalmist writes in verse 113: *I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.* The word translated *vain* is סַעֲפִי' (say-afe') and means "divided, dis-united, futile." On Mt. Carmel, the prophet Elijah uses this same word to describe the minds of the people of Israel (1 Kgs. 18:20-21a). Elijah asks the crowd: *How long halt ye between two opinions?* (18:21b). Then, what does he command the people in the remainder of that verse?

Vain, or double-minded, people go through the motions of Christianity, but are not fully committed. When they are in one crowd, they say they believe God's Word; while in another crowd, they betray His Word. The result is they cannot do anything with conviction, so their minds are filled with



doubt. Going back to the hiking metaphor—their “boots” are so full of “rocks,” they limp through life in misery.

When we are single-minded in our commitment to God’s Word, He becomes our *hiding place* and our *shield* (v. 114). We simply do our best to keep His commandments (v. 115) and leave the rest to Him. He upholds our lives as He has promised (vv. 116a and 117a), and we unashamedly grow in our hope and respect for His Word (verses 116b and 117b).

In summary, the more we commit to God’s Word, the more we see He is faithful in it. The effect of this process is our minds experience a deepening sense of peace and confidence.

The second way to experience **peace of mind** is . . .

Be humble (119:118-120).

We read in verse 118: *Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood.* The word translated *statutes* is *ḥok* (hoke) and means “prescription” or “boundary.” A doctor’s prescription is required to purchase powerful medicines. The prescription instructs the patient on the proper use of the medicine. If the patient ignores the prescription, that same medicine can become a poisonous overdose.

In a similar way, judgment falls on those who think they know better than the *statutes*, or “prescriptions,” of God Almighty. Romans 1:18a-b describes how God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against our ungodliness. What do we read in the last phrase of that verse?

When we think we know better than God, we suppress the *truth*, and sin is conceived. Jesus is kind and merciful to all who humbly admit their sin. However, He is merciless to those who hide their sin behind prideful religion. What does Jesus say to the prideful Pharisees in Matthew 23:27b-c?

The psalmist continues in verse 119, saying God will discard the wicked like *dross*. *Dross* is the impure waste that floats to the top when metal is refined. The refiner skims off the dross and tosses it in the trash. This is a powerful picture of the coming day of judgment. It is truly terrifying to imagine the judgment of those who have pridefully rejected the Truth of our Creator (v. 120). However, when we humbly admit our sinfulness to God,

we receive His mercy and grace. Our humble minds can be at peace, knowing we live under His grace and not His wrath!

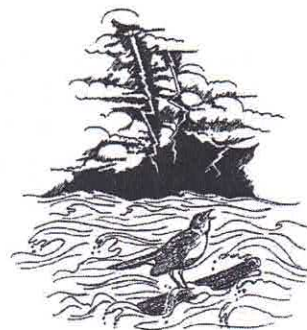
The third way to experience **peace of mind** is . . .

Be submissive (119:121-126).

The psalmist realizes he cannot withstand his oppressors without God's help. He has done his best to do *judgment and justice* (v. 121), but his best is not enough. No one is smart enough, rich enough, powerful enough, or resourceful enough to defeat our overwhelming enemies—Satan, fallen angels, the rebellious world, and our own fallen flesh. These enemies of God seek to destroy mankind, who is made in God's image. What is our only hope, according to Romans 10:9?

When you submit to Jesus Christ as your “Lord,” He becomes your king and you become His servant. As a servant in God's kingdom, you can call on your King for help. This is exactly what the psalmist does in verse 122: *Be surety for thy servant for good*, and again in verse 124: *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy*.

Christians can experience **peace of mind** in any circumstances because we know the truth of 1 John 4:4b. Write that verse here:



The word translated *greater* is μέγας (meg'-as). We serve a King who has **mega-power**! However, our King also has steadfast love for His servants. The only way we can lose our peace of mind is if we forget these delightful truths. This is why the psalmist calls out in verse 125: *I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies*.

The deeper our understanding of God's *testimonies*, the deeper our peace of mind will flow. To experience **peace of mind** in a chaotic world, **be single-minded** in our commitment, **be humble** in our weakness, **be submissive** to our loving King, and . . .

Be considerate (119:127-128).

When we carefully consider what is important in life, we can keep everything in proper perspective. As we practice God's precepts, we become wise and our minds become more peaceful. This does not mean we will

have peaceful lives in this fallen world. Jesus himself says, *Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division* (Lk 12:51). The Christian will never live at peace in this sinful world.

However, Jesus does bring peace to all those who will receive Him. In John 16:33a, Jesus tells His followers He is teaching us so in Him we may have peace. However, what does He add in the last two phrases of this verse?

One morning I dashed out the front door on the way to work. My mind was on the urgent tasks waiting for me. As I heard the door close behind me, a cold sensation went down my spine. I had just locked myself out of the house. I tried the door. It was locked tight. I went to the back door. Locked. I pushed on a nearby window. Shut tight. My stress climbed even higher as I realized my cell phone was also inside, so I couldn't call anyone for help.

As my mind spun around looking for solutions, I decided to sit down on the front porch and think things through. As I slumped into the chair, the answer poked me in the backside. My keys were in my back pocket the whole time.

The only way we Christians can lose our peace of mind is to forget we have access to the Holy King of the universe. That is exactly what the apostle Paul is saying in Philippians 4:6. Personalize and paraphrase that wonderful verse below:

Perhaps you are experiencing the tribulation in this world and not feeling the peace of mind God offers. Look in your "back pocket," and consider all the promises and testimonies of the Bible. Put your faith in them and watch God work as He has promised. Just like the psalmist, you will learn to love God's *commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold* (119:127).

This prayer of the psalmist shows us that to experience **peace of mind** in a world of chaos, we must: **be single-minded** in our confidence in the Bible, **be humble** about our weaknesses, **be submissive** to our loving King, and **be considerate** of the exceeding value of prayer and Scripture.

LESSON 11 . . . Six Wonders of God's Word (119:129-144)



NOTES

The word “wonder” is not used much anymore. Perhaps our minds are calloused by the rapid advances of technology. We see endless superhero movies in which anything is possible. With the click of a button, we send messages around the world in an instant. We order something using our phone, and it arrives at our doorstep in two days or less. These things were unimaginable when I was a child. But today, they are as ordinary as a slice of bread.

How can the Bible compete with these modern marvels? While worldly ways satisfy us for a moment, God's wonderful words can satisfy us every moment of our lives. How does Jesus describe the ultimate wonder of God's Word in John 5:24?

The psalmist states in 119:129: God's *testimonies are wonderful*. In the next two stanzas of this chapter, we will look at **six wonders of God's Word** that tower above all worldly attractions. The first is . . .

#1: It gives sight to the simple (119:129-131).

In times past, almost every car had a road map in the glove box. When called upon, the person in the passenger seat would pull out the map, unfold it, spread it out on the dash, and trace the route being taken.

This is a picture of what the psalmist writes in verse 130: *The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple*. When we unfold God's Truth in front of us, we gain access to illuminate the shadowy roads of the day.

However, this light is not reserved for a privileged elite; it is wholly available to the *simple* as well. The word translated *simple* is פֶּתִי (peth-ee') and refers to a naïve child. What does Jesus say about being *simple* in Luke 18:17?

God's wonderful Word gives sight to both the PhD and the kid.

#2: It offers grace to the guilty (119:132).

I once sat in a circle of devout Muslim men who wanted to debate religious doctrine. After an hour of fruitless wrangling, I finally said, “Well, there is one thing I know for sure—we are all sinners before God and need forgiveness.” Everyone in the circle nodded in agreement. However, for the Muslim (and every other religion I know about), hope for forgiveness is based on religious works. These religious systems teach that God’s forgiveness must be earned through hard work and devotion. What is God’s wonderful reply to a works-based religion (Romans 6:23)?



Each of us stands guilty of treason against our Creator. If we receive His perfect justice, we will be eternally cast out of His presence. If we receive His perfect grace, we will be eternally brought into His presence. Without the Bible, we would have no knowledge of God’s perfect grace. God’s wonderful Word presents God’s gift of grace to all who will receive it. As the psalmist sings in verse 132: *Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.*

The next wonder of God’s Word found in this psalm is . . .

#3: It gives footing to the floundering (119:133-136).

I began my college career on a sports scholarship. I lived in the athletic dorm, wore the t-shirts issued by the athletic department, and hung out with the rest of the team. When people asked me who I was, I would say, “I’m a football player.” Then, I suffered a career-ending series of knee injuries. I lost that identity and was totally disoriented. What would I do now? Who was I if not a football player? Why was I even at this college now? I floundered around for the next two or three years.

However, when I fully embraced God’s Truth, I experienced what the psalmist prays in 119:133a. Write this verse below:

The Bible also showed me God prepares good works for me to do every day (Eph. 2:10). Plus, He has specially gifted me for His purposes (Rom. 12:6). God’s wonderful Word gave me emotional and spiritual traction to get out of my rut and onto His path of purpose.

As we walk in the presence of God’s Truth, we see people with the compassion described by the psalmist in 119:136: *Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.* Nothing breaks our hearts more than watching people we love stumble into the traps of the Evil One.

When we are **floundering**, there is a wonderful promise in Isaiah 35:3. Write it below:



The next wonder of God's Word is . . .

#4: It gives a reason to do right (119:137-139).

The psalmist begins the next stanza: *Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments* (v. 137). Each person must make decisions about right and wrong every day. God's wonderful Word gives us clear understanding of how to discern right from wrong.

The modern person has a difficult time with moral choices. In the late 20th century, western culture began to embrace "postmodernism." Postmodernists teach there is no God. Therefore, there is no such thing as absolute right and wrong. Each individual person must define what is right and wrong for him or her. This philosophy is at the root of most secular media and education today. Their answer to every situation is: "What is true for you is not necessarily true for me."

This is only a new version of the first lie Satan told our ancestors. What were the first words of Satan's temptation in Genesis 3:1c?

The psalmist counters this ancient lie in 119:138: *Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful*. God's Word is true, regardless of anyone's belief. So, when life is confusing and the world says to forget about God's words, we have a reason to do what is right. We know God's ways are always the best ways, even when our *enemies have forgotten* His Word (119:139).

This brings us to the next wonder of God's Word . . .

#5: It gives purpose to the perishing (119:140-142).

Verse 140 states: *Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it*. The word translated *pure* means tried or tested. This verse reminds us of Hebrews 11 and its long list of people who *tried* God's promises. From Abraham to Rahab to the early disciples, we have testimony after testimony of people who walked in God's purpose all their lives. The conclusion of each of these testimonies is **God is faithful** and **He will fulfill His promises**.

Then, we read in Hebrews 12:1a-b: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin . . .* Then, what does the last phrase of this verse urge us to do (12:1d)?



God's redemptive work in the Christian has three wonderful parts: 1) forgiveness of every sin; 2) good works prepared for every day; and 3) an eternal home in heaven. Satan knows he cannot change number one or three. So, he tries to distract us from being faithful in the second part.

Like the psalmist, we should pray: *I am small and despised: yet do not I forget thy precepts* (119:141). Though we are little people in a big world, God's Word promises a purpose for every day we live on this fallen earth.

#6: It gives strength to the suffering (119:143-144).

The psalmist continues: *Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights* (v. 143). The word translated *trouble* [צָר, zar] means "adversary" or "enemy." The word translated *anguish* [מַצוֹק, maw-soak'] means "stress" or "pressure." In Judges 16:16, it is translated *vexed* to describe what Samson experienced from Delilah. What does that verse tell us?

Samson's life is a warning for all of us. The strongest man in the Bible did not keep the Word of God in front of him, so he was crushed by the force of *trouble and anguish* that came upon him.

God's wonderful words make us stronger than Samson. That is why the psalmist can sing: *thy commandments are my delights* in the same moment tribulation has arrived. How does David describe this delight in Psalm 23:5?

Let us be amazed by these wonders of God's Word:

1) It gives **sight** to the simple; 2) It offers **grace** to the guilty; 3) It gives **footing** to the floundering; 4) It gives a **reason** to do right; 5) It gives **purpose** to the perishing; and 6) It gives **strength** to the suffering.

LESSON 12 . . . Prayer That Delivers Us from Evil (119:145-160)



NOTES

When the disciples notice Jesus' prayers are powerful, they ask Him to teach them to pray (Lk 11:1). Jesus answers: *When ye pray, say. . .* and then delivers the "Model Prayer" in Luke 11:2-4. A full version is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. The final supplication of that prayer is: *but deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13b). In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul instructs us in preparing for spiritual warfare. What is the final instruction (Ephesians 6:18a)?

Evil forces are present and active around us. We cannot fight these forces without prayer. In the next two stanzas of Psalm 119, we will examine the psalmist's prayer for deliverance from evil. Let's learn from Scripture **four** aspects of praying for deliverance from the evil of this age. First . . .

Pray earnestly (119:145-148).

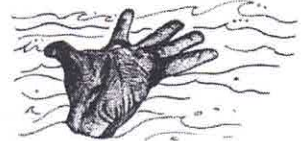
The psalmist begins in verse 145: *I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD!* God has led him into a desperate situation. It is a situation filled with *trouble and anguish* (v. 143), as described in the previous lesson. Desperate times call for desperate prayers.

When we are desperate, we don't have time for pretense and procedure. We get straight to the point with God. In Matthew 14, the apostle Peter gets to the point with Jesus when he begins to sink into the stormy sea. He earnestly prays the shortest prayer in the Bible. What does Peter cry (14:30b)?

The desperate prayer works! Jesus immediately grabs Peter and helps him walk back across the stormy seas to the boat. Peter's prayer is echoed in the psalmist's prayer in verse 146a, *I cried unto thee; save me*.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus teaches the importance of earnest prayer by telling a parable comparing the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. The Pharisee prays a long, people-pleasing prayer. The tax collector simply bows his head and prays: *God be merciful to me a sinner* (Lk 18:13d). Jesus says the tax collector goes home justified, and the Pharisee does not. An earnest prayer is an effective prayer.

In verses 147 and 148, we can see the psalmist has a desperate situation that keeps him up late and gets him up early. His only relief is found in



meditating on God's promises. Instead of tossing and turning all night worrying about our difficult situations, we should focus instead on God's promises. Read them, say them out loud, and earnestly hold onto them.

We can see Scripture's most vivid example of earnest prayer in Luke 22:42. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays: *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* An angel then appears and strengthens Jesus as He continues to pray. How is Jesus' prayer described in Luke 22:44:



If we want our prayers to deliver us from evil, we must pray earnestly like the psalmist, the apostle Peter, the tax collector, and the Lord Jesus. In addition, we must also . . .

Pray confidently (119:149-152).

Our English word "confident" comes from the Latin *con-* meaning "with," and *-fides* meaning "faith." To pray confidently means to pray with faith. We believe God will answer our prayers because we believe in His love and goodness. What does the psalmist pray in verse 149?

We do not pray with confidence in who **we** are, but with confidence in who **God** is. In verse 151, we see the psalmist is confident in more than God's *lovingkindness* and *judgment*. He proclaims: *Thou art near, O LORD.* So, we can also have faith God is near us as we pray.

We read in James 4:8a, *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.* This eternal truth was revealed long before the New Testament age. What does King David write in Psalm 145:18?

So, how can we learn to pray with confidence like this? Our faith grows as we regularly hear the Word of God. Holy Scripture is both the seed and fertilizer of our faith. As the seed germinates in our hearts, it becomes living and active in our daily lives. This process is the source of the psalmist's powerful faith expressed in verse 152: *Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever.*

God does not change; He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Mal. 3:6). He is loving and merciful to all who humbly call out to Him. He is not surprised by what is happening. He has a plan that will be accomplished in this world. He will indeed reward those who walk faithfully in the path He has established for them. Because of these unchanging truths, we can **pray confidently**.

If we want to be delivered from the evil of this world, we must **pray earnestly** with an honest heart, **pray confidently** in God's promises, and we must. . .

Pray biblically (119:153-156).

In verse 153b, the psalmist declares his basis for asking for deliverance. What is it?

When we want someone to show us mercy we might say, "I know I'm not perfect, but look at so and so; they are worse than me." This is nothing new; it began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam blamed Eve, who in turn blamed the serpent. This blame game did not convince God then, and it does not convince Him now. God acts according to His established decree.



Verses 154b-155 declare: *deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.* ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾*Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.* While our fallen nature wants to approach God on its own terms, the Bible says we must approach God according to His rules.

Every manmade religion has a set of rules by which a person can find spiritual peace. The Buddhist has the "Eightfold Path," the Muslim has the "Five Pillars of Islam," the Hindu has the "Karmic Law and Reincarnation," and the Jew has the "Law and the Prophets." Even the unreligious person says, "I will just be the best person I can be and stand on that." At the judgment, the followers of these false systems will tell God, "I should get into heaven because I earned it."

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, says there is only **one way** we can be saved. What is it, according to John 14:6?

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the apostle Paul tells us why God has orchestrated our salvation in this way. We read, *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, ⁽⁹⁾ Not of works, lest any man should boast.* This is also our basis for prayer. We do not pray based

on our good works, but on what the psalmist declares in Psalm 119:156a: *Great are thy tender mercies, O LORD.*

By God's standard, we can only pray for deliverance by one name—Jesus Christ. That is the biblical way to pray. The final aspect of praying for deliverance from evil is to . . .

Pray obediently (119:157-160).

We read in verse 157: *Many are my persecutors and mine enemies; yet do I not decline from thy testimonies.* It is easy to be obedient to God when we are around like-minded people at church services. While God **is** glorified by our obedience in the presence of other Christians, He is **more** glorified by our obedience in the presence of the ungodly.

In Luke 6:33, Jesus says, *And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.* Then, in verse 35a-c, He tells us what kind of obedience truly glorifies God the most: *love ye your enemies . . . hoping for nothing again . . .* What will be the result, according verse 35d-e?

Our minds, hearts, and emotions must be disciplined to lead us toward God's abundant life. If we are not "disciplined" in Christ's ways, we are not His "disciples." The more our taste for life is shaped by God's Word, the more we dislike the things of the world. We will become like the psalmist, who declares in verse 158, *I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.*

God cannot love us if He does not hate the sin that will destroy us. Likewise, we cannot love other people if we don't hate the sin that is destroying them. That is why Christ calls us to obedience. He says in John 15:5: *I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit . . .* Then, what does Jesus say in the final phrase of this verse?

If we believe what the psalmist proclaims in verse 160, we will live and pray according to God's Truth. He writes: *Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.*

This is why prayers that deliver us from evil are **earnest, confident, biblical**, and accompanied by **obedience**.



NOTES

LESSON 13 . . . The Purpose of Prolonged Problems (119:161-176)

This is our final lesson in Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible. We have walked with the psalmist as he counters the suffering of his own life with the promises of God. The overall theme is: This fallen world wants to destroy us, but God wants to delight us.

Stanza after stanza, the psalmist has demonstrated how heavenly promises carry him through worldly problems. Every believer in every generation can identify with his experience. Now, in these final verses, the psalmist poetically describes the same truth Paul and Barnabas shared with first-century Christians. It is recorded in the last phrase of Acts 14:22. Write it below:

God has a purpose for every problem He allows. Sometimes these purposeful problems drag on for days, months, or years. In fact, each one of us will have problems that last a lifetime. Regardless of the duration, there is always a purpose. The first purpose for prolonged problems is . . .

They direct us to God's Word (119:161-168).

The psalmist begins by proclaiming: *Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word* (v. 161). Children often protest to their parents: "That's not fair!" Then, their parents usually make some sort of concession to appease the demonstration. Some parents come up with more crafty solutions. The father of one of my friends had a unique reply. He would raise his eyebrows and say, "Sorry, boys. The fair only comes to town once a year, and I don't see any elephants."

Eventually, I understood his strange reply. He was teaching us youngsters a grown-up truth: **life is rarely fair and just**. In the psalmist's words, this fallen world persecutes people *without a cause*. However, our hearts rejoice at the hearing of God's Word (v. 162). Just like the psalmist, we long for God's *righteous judgments* (verses 163-165), but we cannot produce it on our own. Why is this true, according to Romans 1:28?

The word translated *reprobate* can refer to broken scales that are unable to accurately measure things. Our fallen minds are broken “scales,” unable to correctly measure and apply truth. The result is a world filled with all manner of selfishness, envy, strife, murder, deceit, and every evil thing (Rom. 1:29). Therefore, the world will be filled with prolonged problems as long as God allows us to live in this fallen world with billions of fallen minds.



Our only hope is in what the psalmist prays in verse 166: *LORD, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.* We do not put our hope in the things of this world, but in the coming *salvation* of the Lord. And, in the meantime, we allow the teachings of the Bible to inform our thoughts and guide our actions.

Not only do prolonged problems **direct us to God’s Word**, but also . . .

They perfect us for God’s Will (119:169-176).

God uses problems to train and discipline us so we can accomplish the good works He prepares for us. This process is called “sanctification.” In this passage, we can see at least five ways God sanctifies us through prolonged problems:

1. Problems teach us our limits. In verse 169, the psalmist says: *Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.* The Bible tells God’s people to think carefully about what they believe and how they live. God uses prolonged problems to keep us humble, which is a very good thing. What do we read in James 4:10?

Pride bars the door of our hearts against God’s presence. Humility unlocks the door and invites Him inside. The problem may persist, but He will prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies (Psa. 23:5). Also . . .

2. Problems inspire us to praise God. We can see the result of problems that humble us in verses 171-172: *My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.* ⁽¹⁷²⁾ *My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness.* When God brings us through a circumstance that is beyond our capacity, He is the only one who gets the credit. In Luke 18:42, Jesus heals a blind man. What is the result (18:43b)?

God leads each of us into circumstances that we cannot handle with our own power and resources. He wants to show us, along with everyone watching, that He is able and faithful to deliver us. We see this clearly through the suffering of Lazarus and his family. What does Jesus say is the purpose of his friends' suffering in John 11:4c-d?

3. Problems display God's power to us. The psalmist continues in verses 173-174: *Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.* ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ *I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight.* Perhaps no character in the Bible personifies this verse like Gideon. He is the weakest man in the weakest family in one of the weakest tribes. But when Gideon obeys the Word of God, He is transformed into a mighty warrior. He cannot trust in his own strength nor the strength of his small army. So, he puts his weakness into the powerful hand of God (Judges 6:11-8:28).

Paul tells the believers in Corinth: *I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities* (2 Cor. 11:30b). Paul can boast in his own weakness because of a promise God has given him. What is the promise (2 Corinthians 12:9a)?

The next reason God sanctifies us with prolonged problems is . . .

4. Problems show us God's perspective. Verse 175a makes a simple request: *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee.* The psalmist does not ask God for riches or achievements or even good health. He asks for one thing—a life that glorifies God. Let's summarize the lives of some Old Testament characters who glorify God:

- **Noah** works for decades before the rains come. Then, he and his family live in the ark for over a year before the waters recede.
- **Abraham** and **Sarah** follow God away from their family and homeland but do not have the promised child until they are senior citizens.
- **Joseph** endures a lonely decade as a slave and prisoner until he is reunited with his family.
- **Moses** toils as a lowly shepherd for forty years before receiving his call to ministry at 80 years old.
- **Ruth** endures the loss of every man in her family, a move to a foreign country, and years of poverty, until the Lord introduces her to Boaz.



- After his anointing, **David** is on the run for more than ten years before he becomes king of Israel.

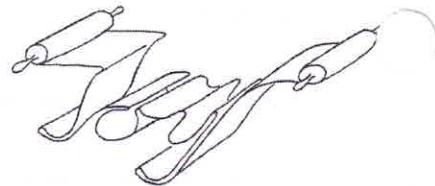
Each of these people endured difficult circumstances over extended periods of time. They waited . . . and waited . . . and waited on the Lord's timing. This pattern continues throughout the New Testament and into our generation. What does Jesus tell the disciples about God's timing in Acts 1:7b?

The biblical perspective remembers God is working on a heavenly timetable that began before we were born.

And now, a final reason God sanctifies us with prolonged problems . . .

5. Problems help us recognize our failures. Psalm 119 concludes with a humble confession: *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments* (v. 176). Though Psalm 119 is completed, the psalmist must continue to live on in a fallen world. He acknowledges his failings and his need for God's provision.

For 176 verses, Psalm 119 has shown us how and why we can **delight in God's Word**. It is our treasure, our source of hope, our light in a dark world, and our promise of a future. Perhaps the whole of the message is summarized in Psalm 119:2. Let's finish this "journey" by writing this verse below:



Amen.