

PSALM 119.1-8

psalm
God's Word 119

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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalm 119.1-8
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Introduction to Psalm 119.1-8

The first three verses of Psalm 119 are the only ones that aren't in the form of a prayer. But they're very important, because they set the direction for the entire psalm to follow.

And in verse 4-8, that direction begins to receive elaboration, as the psalmist brings to the surface those primary themes of seeking God in His Law so that we may know happiness and delight in Him.

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We hope you find this study of Psalm 119 instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Proem (1)

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verse 1.

Preparation

1. Who are the “blessed”?
2. Who are the “undefiled”?

Meditation

A “proem” is a prelude or an introduction, especially to a song or a poem. All the important ideas and teachings of Psalm 119 are introduced in the three verses of this proem, beginning with verse 1. This is the א (aleph) stanza of Psalm 119, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, all of which are consonants. It does not have a sound of its own but depends on whatever vowel accompanies it to give it voice. The first word of each verse in this stanza begins with א, but it is variously pronounced: *ab* in verses 1-6, *ob* in verse 7, and *eb* in verse 8.

Psalm 119 begins where the entire psalter begins, with the idea of happiness (cf. Ps. 1.1). The Hebrew word אֲשֶׁרֶי (ash-RAY) means something like “completely happy and fulfilled”. Psalm 119 outlines the way to complete happiness, contentment, and spiritual delight and joy. Verse 1 also tips the psalmist’s hand about how to attain this: walk in the Law of the Lord. This means repenting and turning from everything that “defiles” us (“blameless”, cf. Lk. 1.6). Verse 1 also introduces a standard Biblical metaphor for our lives: “way”. We are on a journey, and only one way will get us to the destination that brings happiness. The challenge is to make sure our “way” lines up with God’s “way” by learning, delighting in, and obeying His Law and all His Word. Happiness depends on walking in the Law of God.

Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas more than sounds (although *sb* and *kb* sounds repeat in verse 1). Verse 1 begins a rhyming scheme that will be deepened and extended in verses 2 and 3 in a variety of ways, as we shall see. These are the only verses in this psalm that are not in the form of a prayer. They serve as a call to worship, pointing to the object of our worship – God Himself – and describing the way we should come before Him.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

God, through the psalmist’s pen, is reaching out to His people to tell us how to be pleasing to Him.

Psalm 119.1-8

When we are pleasing to Him, we are blessed. And when we are blessed by God, we are happy. It's like a heavenly round of "Row, row, row your boat".

God gave us a concise and cogent list of how to realize this in Exodus 20.1-17. This Law is the Ten Commandments. As many have pointed out through the years, it is not known as the Ten Suggestions. It is Law. It is essential. It is necessary. Without it, and without Him, we cannot survive. "...for in Him we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17.28).

Keeping God's Law is our greatest and most potent testimony: "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them" (Prov. 28.4). Our obedience speaks loudly and clearly that we are Christians. It is truly the best witness we have. Bar none.

"Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways" (Ps. 128.1).

"The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread" (Is. 8.13).

"Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments" (Ps. 112.1).

And to cap it all off, it is how we show Jesus that we love Him. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14.15).

God is pleased. We are blessed. And Jesus knows that we love Him. All this goodness through our simple and straightforward obedience. What could be better than that?

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
(Sammis/Towner, 1887)*

For reflection

1. Why do people continue to think that happiness can be found apart from God and His Word?
2. How would you explain the nature of the happiness God promises for obedience to His Word?
3. How does obeying God's Law demonstrate that we love God?

*In these words the prophet sets forth the same paradox which we met with at the commencement of the Book of Psalms. All men naturally aspire after happiness, but instead of searching for it in the right path, they designedly prefer wandering up and down through endless by-paths, to their ruin and destruction. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 119.1**

Pray Psalm 119.1-3.

Pray that your time in God's Word will find you focusing on Him, His will, and His Word – our Lord Jesus Christ. Concentrate on seeing Jesus, exalted in glory, and commit yourself to Him afresh.

Sing Psalm 119.1-3.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law, who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.

Psalm 119.1-8

These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

2 Proem (2)

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verse 2.

Preparation

1. What new verbs are introduced in this verse?
2. How are we supposed to seek God?

Meditation

We're continuing to look at the introduction to Psalm 119 – the proem – to see how it lays the cornerstone for the rest of the psalm. We saw in verse 1 that the focus is on the Lord and His Law; we must set aside all defilement and walk in God's ways. This is the way of happiness. Happiness = walking in God's Law.

Verse 2 further defines what it means to “walk in the law of the LORD!” Here is an example of how Hebrew poetry works to enrich its message by taking a statement to deeper and more intensive levels of meaning. Two additional verbs explain how happy people walk. First, we “keep” or more pointedly “guard” the “testimonies” of the Lord. The testimonies of God are what He has written for His people, and how saints and prophets have elaborated on and exemplified those testimonies by their own lives. We are to guard these as a precious treasure, and to keep watch over them so that they are always before us (cf. Deut. 6.8). We will know happiness as we are careful and diligent concerning the testimonies of God.

Second, we are to “seek” the Lord. Seeking implies attention and objectives for our walk. It deepens our focus on His Law by reminding us that what we're really trying to achieve is the Presence of God, where there is fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore (Ps. 16.11). The end of our reading, meditating, and guarding God's Law is to know God and to love and serve Him obediently in all our ways. This is the happy life.

Finally, verse 2 further deepens the nature of our walk by explaining that it must come from within, from our heart, that we must long for God, desire and delight in His Word, and cherish Him and His Law above all other things. When we do, and as we guard the treasure He has deposited in us – earthen vessels though we are (2 Cor. 4.7) – we will walk in His ways and know complete happiness and fulfillment.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The psalmist offers clarification on the way to know blessing from God: Keep His testimonies. Seek Him

with our whole heart. And to emphasize the indispensability of these, our translators end with an exclamation mark! (Ps. 119. 2)

James warns us that without faith in God we are double-minded. And being double-minded makes us unstable in all our ways. We are to seek God with our whole heart. Not half our heart. If we do it with only half, we will be unstable in all our ways. It's a warning from the Word of God (Jms. 1.6-8).

James very kindly gives us a remedy for being in this poorly condition: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (Jms. 4.8). It is always nice to know there is a cure for our dilemma.

James was echoing our psalmist and Moses, who told us long ago how we should seek the LORD. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6.5). No room for bifurcation there. All, all, all.

And Jesus reiterated Moses' words. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22.37). Again, all, all, all.

Moses, and Jesus, the psalmist, and James all want us to be blessed. And they all agree about how we are to go about receiving this blessing: With everything that is within you, keep His Law and seek His help to do it.

*All for Jesus! All for Jesus! All my being's ransomed pow'rs;
All my thoughts and words and doings, All my days and all my hours.*
(James, 1889/Stainer, 1887)

For reflection

1. What does it mean to "seek" God in His Word? How should you "keep" that Word before you throughout the day?
2. The Scripture emphasizes the importance of engaging God's Word with *all* your heart. What does this mean for you?
3. What is Biblical happiness? Why is Biblical happiness the only happiness that truly satisfies?

We will be blessed if we know the heavenly commands, yet still more so if we eagerly pursue in our works the things that we know. One who neglects to keep his known commandments is not capable of being happy; one who scorns finding out about these [commandments] is separated much further away from the heritage of the blessed. The Venerable Bede (672-735), *Homilies on the Gospels* 2.5

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Pray that God's Word will be before you throughout the day and that you will walk in His ways in all you do. Set your heart to give Him thanks and praise throughout the day as He leads you along His chosen path.

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

3 Proem (3)

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verse 3.

Preparation

1. Who walks in the ways of the Lord?
2. To what are the "ways of the Lord" equal (v. 1)?

Meditation

Our formula for happiness can be more precisely stated:

Happiness = walking^{attentively, diligently, carefully without iniquity} in God's Law^{testimonies, ways}
with the whole heart.

Verse 3 of our proem brings the prelude back to its beginning with a type of parallelism called *inclusio*. This verse restates verse one, with some elaboration as it completes a literary circle back to the beginning. Along the way, the "law of the LORD" (v. 1) is enlarged to "His ways" (v. 3) – how He thinks and desires, what His priorities are, what He does, and where His company (Presence) may be found. We walk (vv. 1, 3) those ways as we keep God's Word and ourselves "undefiled" (v. 1) – doing "no iniquity" (v. 3) – and seek the Lord, and when this whole process is defined and ruled by "the whole heart".

When we set the proem out as a whole, with emphases to indicate parallel ideas, we see how tightly-knit its features are, as if tied like and pulled tight to bundle up the single, consistent message of Psalm 119:

Blessed are the **undefiled** in *the way*,
Who walk in *the law* of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep *His testimonies*,
Who seek Him WITH THE WHOLE HEART!!
They also **do no iniquity**;
They walk in *His ways*.

As we walk those ways, whole-heartedly invested in knowing Him, we find the happiness for which we have been created and which we so earnestly desire. Psalm 119 will be shaped, guided, and unpacked by this framework and focus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Family relationships are one of the ways that God exemplifies our relationship with Him.

When we have been charged with the weighty responsibility of being a parent, one of our main goals is to teach our children to obey our voice, not a screaming voice, but just a normal voice. And when that normal voice says, “Don’t step out in the street”, that is exactly what we mean, right then, and don’t perhaps have the time to share lengthy explanations of why we would like that to be obeyed. “It is for your life; it is for your safety.”

God, of course, is so much wiser, so much more loving, so totally perfect; and He has a few warnings He speaks to us, in His still, small voice (1 Kgs. 19.12). He says to us, His beloved, “I AM God, don’t worship anyone other than Me. And don’t bother with making carved images as they are pointless. Don’t say you’re a Christian and then behave abominably. Remember that one day out of seven is special for Me and for you. Worship Me, get some rest. You have a big week ahead. Be respectful to your earthly parents. Don’t intentionally kill anyone. Don’t be unfaithful to your spouse. Don’t steal anything from anyone. Don’t tell lies. Don’t covet what other people have” (Ex. 20.1-17).

My goodness. How hard should that be? We don’t want anyone to do those awful things to us, why should we ever contemplate doing that to them? Of course. Wait. We are fallible human beings, and we struggle to be good. But. There is an intentionality, a matter of the heart, that we must be mindful of. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23).

And that is where our verse today rears its head. “They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways” (Ps. 119.3). Boom! Intentionally, no less. We intend to not do anything displeasing to our heavenly Father. We intentionally walk in the way He has told us to go. And we hear His still, small, voice shouting loud and clear. “My children do this. Because I tell them to. I have trained them to do this. Just look at them! I’m so happy they are behaving this way for their own good!” “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (Jn. 10.27, 28).

Blessed. Abundantly, fully, completely, and eternally. But we must intend to do no iniquity and walk in His ways to be pleasing to Him; and to show Him how thankful we are to be blessed.

For reflection

1. What can you do to make sure you walk in God’s ways every day?
2. How can prayer help you to make sure your heart is fully committed to God and His Law?
3. Summarize the teaching of the poem of Psalm 119.

The Law was never designed as a means of salvation; no one could be saved by keeping it. The Lord gave His law to a people with whom He had already graciously established a covenantal relationship (Ex. 20:2). Instead, the Law was the means for the Israelites to learn how to live as God’s holy people. The psalmists consistently describe the Law of God as a great blessing, for it was God’s gracious revelation to His people for their own good (Deut. 6:1–3). Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Notes on Psalm 119.1-8

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Ask the Lord to lead you more deeply into His happiness today by teaching you from His Word, filling you with His Spirit, showing you Jesus in His Word, and leading you in the upright path.

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

4 Not an Option

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded *us*
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verse 4.

Preparation

1. What has God commanded?
2. What are we to "keep"?

Meditation

When God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden, He sent an angel with a fiery sword to guard the garden's entrance so that fallen people may bring corruption into it no more (Gen. 3.24). Imagine that Adam tried to return to the garden one day. What do you see that angel doing to prevent him? Do you think that angel would have failed? Would he have used that fiery sword to keep the garden from being invaded?

The command given the angel to "guard" the garden is the same command given us where the precepts – teachings and doctrines – of God are concerned. We are to guard ("keep") them with our life, to defend them against all naysayers and usurpers, to wield them with fiery power so that the living and powerful Word of God can at all times fulfill the purpose for which He sends it forth (Heb. 4.12; Is. 55.10).

Guarding the precepts of God is full-time work. It requires daily preparation, constant vigilance, earnest exertion, and continuous review. And it's not optional. God has not called for volunteers to take up this aspect of His work. He has commanded us to this work. All who seek the happiness of knowing Him by trusting in Jesus and submitting to His Word are called to the work of guarding the doctrines and teachings of that Word diligently, energetically, and fervently.

Guarding them with your life, in every aspect of your life, all the days of your life. Diligently. Are you prepared to guard the teaching of God's Word today?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

What does it mean to do something diligently?

Diligence is defined as careful and persistent work. To give our work a steady, earnest, and energetic effort.

That is how we are to view all the things that God has commanded us to do and not do. We are to proceed

wholeheartedly, with nothing taking precedence over our obedience to God. And obeying God in all we do, makes what we do, pleasing to Him.

God's children, in Zechariah's day, were keeping some of the Law by fasting and mourning, a traditional holiday of sorts. But their hearts were not right. They were merely going through the motions. And God knew. In fact, He told Zechariah to say to these people, "When you fasted and mourned...did you really fast for Me – for Me?" (Zech. 7.5)

God wants us to care and do His will in the same way that He cares for us. He told Jeremiah to tell the people, "Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul" (Jer. 32.41). We must be equally diligent about keeping His precepts. With our whole heart and whole soul.

"You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently" (Ps. 119.4).

Indeed, it is not an option.

For reflection

1. How would you explain what it means to keep God's precepts diligently?
2. What can keep you from doing this?
3. What can you do to overcome any obstacles to keeping God's precepts diligently?

"You have commanded your commandments to be kept most diligently." Then follows, "O! that my ways may be directed to obey your decrees. Then shall I not be confounded, when I shall look into all your commandments." He [the psalmist] begged that this thing be fulfilled by him, which he stated God had commanded. Augustine (354-430), Holy Virginitly 41.42

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Ask God to give you strength of heart, mind, conscience, and life to guard His precepts today in all you say and do, that your ways may be His ways at all times.

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

5 The Law as Mirror

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verses 5, 6.

Preparation

1. What did the psalmist earnestly desire?
2. Why did he desire that?

Meditation

Twice in the New Testament the Law of God is referred to as mirror. The seeds of that good and useful idea may be right here in these verses.

In 2 Corinthians 3.12-18 Paul says the Law is a mirror that reflects the glory of God, especially as we see that glory in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6). It shows us what God intends for us to become – the likeness of Jesus Himself!

James says the Law shows us where corrections are needed, so that we may live in that freedom from sin which is the privilege of the children of God (Jms. 1.22-25). The Law reveals sin (Rom. 7.7) so that, seeing it anywhere in us, we can be cleansed and get on with becoming more like Jesus.

In our passage today, the psalmist expresses the desire not to be ashamed when he looks into all the commandments of God. Note: *all* the Law, not just a few select passages. Further, the phrase “When I look” is better translated “In my looking”, that is, as often as I look or whenever I look. This implies repeated and consistent activity. We should be in the Law daily (Ps. 1.1-3).

And why does the psalmist look into all the Law of God? That His paths may be directed in the footsteps of God’s statutes – the footsteps of Jesus (Matt. 5.17-19; 1 Jn. 2.1-6) – and that he may not be ashamed as he returns to the mirror of the Law day after day. Notice also how he picks up on “keep” from verse 4 and brings that into his daily walk, that it should be diligent, fervent, and constant.

Had a good look in the mirror lately? Much good can come from doing so.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Where is the conscience of God’s people today? It seems to have evaporated. The lack stems from the fact

that “there is no fear of God” before anyone’s eyes anymore (Ps. 36.1; Rom. 3.18). Even in the church. And without this fear there is no shame because, “What have we done to feel bad about?” People are so out of touch with the Law of God and so in tune with the notion that “it’s all about grace” that God’s laws are broken with impunity.

To be ashamed is to be embarrassed or guilty because of one’s actions, characteristics, or associations. When is the last time you heard anything from a pulpit that would cause even a twitter of guilt in your heart? Or how about when we are in the Word of God reading from His Law? Do we even remember how to be embarrassed or ashamed?

The psalmist was expecting that we would feel shame when we look into all God’s commandments because we would see with 20/20 vision all the ways we fail the Lord. He wanted that not to be the case. Jesus upped the ante when He said that sin is found in us even when we are thinking about breaking the commandments (Matt. 5.21-28). “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23.7). “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23).

Do we long for our ways to be directed by the Lord Jesus so that we will keep all God’s statutes? Do we also pray that God will convict us of our sin; and that we will know how to be ashamed enough to repent and change our ways?

When we are hardened to God’s Law, when we don’t feel ashamed for displeasing Him, we have a heart of stone. God can change that. In fact, He promises to do just that: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezek. 36.26, 27).

His Holy Spirit will direct our steps. This same Spirit will allow us to feel enough shame in our missteps to cause us to change course, look more fervently into His commandments, and follow His guidance more carefully. Step by step. Day by day. Sensitive to His rebukes. Ashamed. Cognizant of His forgiveness and love.

As we consistently look into the mirror of the Law.

For reflection

1. What is shame? How does it work in our soul? To what ends?
2. How can we keep from feeling ashamed whenever we look into the Word of God?
3. How does the Law of God function as a mirror for you?

The psalmists consistently describe the Law of God as a great blessing, for it was God’s gracious revelation to His people for their own good (Deut. 6:1–3). In the Law, God mercifully pointed out the right path to follow. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Notes on Psalm 119.1-8

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Meditate on the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20.1-17). How do you see yourself in these? What needs correcting? How do you see Jesus? Pray this all back to the Father with thanksgiving.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God’s Law, who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.

Psalm 119.1-8

These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

6 When, Then

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verses 7, 8.

Preparation

1. When will the psalmist praise the Lord?
2. When will he keep His statutes?

Meditation

If your times of worship are feeling a little shallow or dry, here's a quick way to improve: Spend more time learning the righteous judgments of God.

If you feel like you're not as close to God as you might like, and even that He might have forsaken you, the same remedy applies.

When did the psalmist say that he would praise God with an upright heart? When he had learned the righteous judgments of God. When would he keep the Lord's statutes? When he had truly learned them.

Learning takes effort. We need to make sure our heart is "upright" – focused on God like Adam before the fall (cf. Eccl. 7.29). And we need to apply ourselves diligently in seeking the Lord in His Word (vv. 2, 8). If, as we turn to His Word, we will call on the Lord to be with us and not forsake us, He will gladly help us grow in understanding, wisdom, and obedience.

We can never plumb the depths of the riches of wisdom and knowledge God has stored up in His Word. And the more we plunge ourselves into His Law, statutes, precepts, judgments, testimonies and all His Word, the more we will learn Jesus and be transformed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Col. 2.2, 3).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

To learn something takes a conscious effort on our part.

As students in school, we do not learn simply because we are there; we must intentionally listen and study the textbook. And we certainly didn't sashay into graduation expecting to nail a summa cum laude simply for good attendance.

The prophet Isaiah said that we should “learn to do good” (Is. 1.17).

Jesus taught that by taking His yoke upon ourselves we could “learn from” Him (Matt. 11.29).

As we learn about God from His Word and from His works, we will learn to praise Him more. As we dwell with Him, we learn from Him, and that leads us to properly praise Him. “Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You” (Ps. 84.4).

The King James Version of the Bible translates 2 Timothy 2.15 like this: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Study. Make an intentional effort to learn the righteous judgments of God. Then we will properly praise Him with our mouth and with our life.

When? Then.

For reflection

1. Why do you suppose some people find studying God’s Word so difficult?
2. What are the most important disciplines you practice in seeking to learn God’s Word?
3. How can we as believers encourage one another in the study of God’s Word?

The psalmist coveted to learn the laws of God, to give God the glory. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 119.1-8*

Pray Psalm 119.5-8.

Call on the Lord to help you learn more of His Law and all His Word. Ask Him to give you something new for today that you might live out in your walk with and work for Him.

Sing Psalm 119.5-8.

(Ode to Joy: [*Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*](#))

Let my ways steadfastly keep to all the statutes of Your Word.
Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!
With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.
I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

7 The Acorn to the Oak

Pray Psalm 119.1-4.

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.

Sing Psalm 119.1-4.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

Blessed are they whose way is blameless, all who walk within God's Law,
who, His testimonies keeping, seek Him, filled with joy and awe.
These are they who, no wrong doing, ever walk within God's ways.
Lord, Your precepts You command us; we would keep them all our days.

Read Psalm 119.1-8; meditate on verses 1, 2.

Preparation

1. How can we be blessed?
2. How must we seek the Lord?

Meditation

We will see throughout Psalm 119 how the composer ties each stanza together and fits it, puzzle-like, into the entire poem. This artful effort is fully on display in verses 1-8, which introduce the theme of the rest of Psalm 119 and thus serve as the acorn to the oak of the entire Psalm.

This first stanza is in two parts, an opening proem (vv. 1-3) followed by a prayer which sets forth the primary message of Psalm 119: God offers happiness to those who obey His Law diligently (who walk, keep, seek, look into, and learn it), that is, with their whole heart (the heart being the wellspring from which all the issues of life emerge, vv. 2, 7; cf. Prov. 4.23). The interjection, "O" (אָחֵלִי, *acheli*, v. 5), precisely in the middle of the stanza, emphasizes the earnestness and longing such obedience requires.

God's Law (v. 1) – His testimonies (v. 2), commandments (vv. 4, 6), precepts (v. 4), statutes (vv. 5, 8), and judgments (v. 8) – brings us into His Presence, so that we may know Him continually (vv. 2, 8). In God's Presence we realize an increasing measure of our original upright condition, are not ashamed, bask in the happiness ("blessed") this affords, and praise God for His goodness and Law (vv. 1, 5, 6, 7).

Progress in blessedness is a process – we *walk* toward it (vv. 1, 3) and *look forward* to it (v. 7) – which involves laying aside sinful ways (vv. 1, 3) and continuing in the path marked out by the Law of God (vv. 3, 5, 8). The way the poet balances the verbs and nouns throughout this stanza creates a powerful linking experience for the reader and introduces what will be the more concisely unpacked in the remaining 21 stanzas.

Anne Bradstreet, America's first lady of verse, once wrote, "Art can do much." Psalm 119.1-8, the acorn to the oak of Psalm 119, proves the truth of that observation.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Imagine that you are online trying to decide what to read, and you see this teaser for an article entitled *Fourteen*

Simple Steps to the Fountain of Youth. Underneath the title it adds the byline, *you'll be thin, healthy, happy, wealthy, and popular in perpetuity.* Do you think you might be tempted to read it? Perhaps with at least a little curiosity? Or be willing to give it some passing interest? Maybe even sit a spell and ponder the possibilities of it?

Here in Psalm 119.1-8 we have an article just like that, the difference being it is true, and it is feasible.

Fourteen Simple Steps in How to be Forever Happy:

1. Be undefiled in God's way of life.
2. Walk in the Law of the LORD.
3. Keep His testimonies.
4. Seek Him with your whole heart.
5. Do no iniquity.
6. Walk in His ways.
7. Keep His precepts diligently.
8. Keep His statutes.
9. Be ashamed enough of your sins to repent.
10. Look into learning all His commandments.
11. Praise God with an upright heart.
12. Learn His righteous judgments.
13. Keep His statutes.
14. Ask God to never forsake you.

We have read this article, we are enticed to participate, we only need the power to live it: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 4.6). "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Acts 1.8).

Yes, but how can we receive that Holy Spirit power?

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12.9).

Only Jesus fulfilled all those 14 points, and only Jesus can lead us down that path to eternal happiness with God. He can give us the power of God's Spirit for the happiness we seek.

And with God's Spirit, His power, His grace, and His all-sufficiency, He will overwhelmingly bless us as we walk in this truth, the acorn to the oak, in the whole of our lives.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to be "blessed" as in "eternally happy"?
2. God insists His Law is the way to such blessing. Why then do we need to look to Jesus?
3. Whom will you encourage to walk the path of blessedness today?

God is by no means satisfied with mere external service, for he demands the sincere and honest affection of the heart. And assuredly, if God be the sole judge and disposer of our life, the truth must occupy the principal place in our heart, because it is not sufficient to have our hands and feet only enlisted in his service. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 119.2*

Pray Psalm 119.1-8.

Call on the Lord to help you learn more of His Law and all His Word. Ask Him to give you something new for today that you might live out in your walk with and work for Him.

Psalm 119.1-8

Sing Psalm 119.1-8.

(Ode to Joy: [Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee](#))

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Then shall I, no shame enduring, fix my eyes on You, O Lord!

With an upright heart I praise You, in Your rules will I abide.

I will keep Your statutes wholly; keep me ever by Your side!

Psalm 119.1-8

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How does the “proem” (vv. 1-3) function in verses 1-8? In Psalm 119 as a whole?
2. Why is the Law of God called a “way”?
3. What verbs does the psalmist use to describe our duty toward God’s Law? What does each of these require of us?
4. What must we leave behind to know the blessedness of obeying God’s Law? Is this a one time or daily obligation? Explain.
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of Psalm 119?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.