

# INTRODUCTION

psalm  
God's Word 119

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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

Psalm 119: Introduction  
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## Introduction to Psalm 119

Besides being the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119 is distinct in other ways.

Except for the first three verses, Psalm 119 is entirely a prayer. In it the anonymous psalmist pours out his heart in longing to know God's Word and to gain the benefits it affords. Psalm 119 is an abecedarian psalm, as we will explain, and this makes it a long and beautiful poem as well.

The focus of the psalm is on God, His Law, and our responsibility as His people for knowing, loving, and obeying His Law and all His Word. In this respect, Psalm 119 is a guide to all Scripture, for it teaches us the how, why, and to what ends we must make the Word of God our lamp, guide, and delight.

In this first of our studies in Psalm 119, we look at some of the recurrent themes of this psalm. This will help to focus the remainder of our study, as we will see these themes over and over throughout the 22 stanzas of this beautiful prayer.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

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 Structure and Terms

*Pray Psalm 119.17-19.*

Deal bountifully with Your servant,  
That I may live and keep Your word.  
Open my eyes, that I may see  
Wondrous things from Your law.  
I *am* a stranger in the earth;  
Do not hide Your commandments from me.

*Sing Psalm 119.17-19.*

(Open My Eyes: *Open My Eyes, That I May See*)  
Open my eyes, Lord, let me see wonderful truths to transform me.  
I am a stranger here in the earth; hide not from me Your glorious worth.  
Deal with your servant graciously that I may walk obediently.  
Open my eyes, Lord, let me see glory divine!

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.17-19.*

*Preparation*

1. What does the writer want God to do?
2. What will that do for the writer?

*Meditation*

Psalm 119 is obviously about the Law of God. Nearly every verse, in one way or another, seeks to lead us to deeper understanding, greater delight, more consistent obedience, and more complete blessing from the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Rom. 7.12). The anonymous writer of Psalm 119 uses a variety of terms to refer to the Law of God and all His Word. We may assume that, while the Law of God – given to Moses – is the foundation of this psalm, the intent of the writer was to include all the written revelation of God – prior to or coming after him – which is grounded in the Law, as part of his meditations.

The psalmist refers to the Word of God as His *Law*. This typically indicates the five books of Moses and the Law of God contained therein. He also pleads for God to explain His *precepts* to him. We might prefer to use the word doctrine rather than precepts, or teachings; either way, this indicates a combining of insights from all the Word of God to elaborate on various topics. *Testimony*, while its primary reference is to the Word written by God, may also refer to the example of great saints like Abraham or Moses or David, whose example of godliness is often cited. God's *justice* and *judgments* refer to the application of His Word in wisdom for every area of life. And His *commandments* are obvious – all that God charges His people to fulfill as a holy people. And all these facets and aspects of the Word of God, which the psalmist so earnestly sought, lead us into the lovingkindness of God, and along the way or path that sees us drawing ever closer to our eternal home with the Lord.

Psalm 119 is an *abecedarian* psalm. Each stanza consists of 8 verses, each of which begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Here are two witnesses to Jesus, Who rose from the dead on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, the first day of the week, and Who is the A to Z, the Alpha and the Omega, the Aleph to Tau, of all things. The structure of Psalm 119 offers an aid to memory, but it also continuously reminds us to seek Jesus as *the* Word of God, in Whom all God's Words find their meaning (Jn. 5.39).

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

“I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me” (Ps. 119.19).

In the same way that the children of Israel were “strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22.21; 23.9; Lev. 19.34; Deut. 10.19), the author of Psalm 119 said he felt like a stranger in the earth. And this is exactly how we are supposed to feel. For we should not fit in with every godless thing that permeates our planet. We shouldn’t really feel at home here. More like strangers, truth be told.

The writer of the book of Hebrews supports this same line of thinking: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11.13). And we, like they, “desire a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb. 11.16). A place where we feel more at home.

But while we are all living on the earth, as strangers, we need to know how to traverse our heavenly land of *there* and *then*, on earth *here* and *now*. And that is exactly what Psalm 119 sets out to help us do.

Our calling, while we are here, is to live always keeping His word (Ps. 119.17). Our aim, while we are here, is to pray that God will “open our eyes” (Ps. 119.18). Why? One reason: “that we may see wondrous things from [His] law” (Ps. 119.18).

It is all quite simple and straightforward. We are strangers on the earth, with one purpose. To feel at home in heaven, while we live on earth, serving our King Jesus. And to do this best, we are obedient to the words of instruction from Paul: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2.15).

And what is this Word of truth that we are to diligently study? It is the Word of God which is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4.12).

And how do we do this? We pray that God will not hide His commandments from us. We pray that He will open our eyes so that we may see the truth. We pray that He will show us wondrous things from His whole Word – law, precepts, testimonies, ways, commandments, judgments, statutes – as we study “precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (Is. 28.10).

Diligently and rightly.

*For reflection*

1. Why must we pray that God will open our eyes to see wondrous things from His Word?
2. What does it mean to seek Jesus everywhere in the Word of God? Why is this so important?
3. What goals would you like to set for our study of Psalm 119? What do you hope to learn?

*God, by his Spirit, gives a right understanding. But the Spirit of revelation in the word will not suffice, unless we have the Spirit of wisdom in the heart. God puts his Spirit within us, causing us to walk in his statutes.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalms 119.33-40*

*Pray Psalm 119.33-35.*

Pray that God will teach you His Word, deeper, more wondrously, and with more resulting power than you have ever known. Call on Him to help you walk His paths today.

*Sing Psalm 119.33-35.*

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

Teach me, Lord, and help me follow in Your holy righteous way!

*Psalm 119: Introduction*

I will keep Your statutes gladly, all your holy Law obey.  
Give me understanding, Jesus, guide me in Your path today!

Make me walk in Your commandments, let me keep Your holy part.  
I will keep Your Law unfailing; from it let me ne'er depart.  
For Your Word is my delight, Lord; help me keep it from the heart.

## 2 Law and Salvation

*Pray Psalm 119.41, 42.*

Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—  
Your salvation according to Your word.  
So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,  
For I trust in Your word.

*Sing Psalm 119.41, 42.*

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Let Your mercies come to me, Your salvation by Your Word.  
From reproaches set me free, for I trust in You, O Lord.  
Let my life an answer be for those who may question me.

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.41, 42 and Psalm 119.81-83.*

*Preparation*

1. Of what use did the psalmist find the Law of God?
2. What was his attitude toward the Law?

*Meditation*

In Romans 2 and 3 the apostle Paul put a torch to the notion that anyone could be saved by Law. In the process he cited numerous Old Testament passages to underpin his argument. People who are sinful by nature cannot overcome that condition and save themselves by keeping the Law of God. At the same time, Paul insisted, the Law of God is not abolished for those who are saved; rather, it is established (Rom. 3.31).

Paul reached that conclusion through His study of the Word, searching the Scriptures diligently and resisting those who reproached him for his views. He was merely expressing in Gospel terms what the writer of Psalm 119 consistently expressed: We are not saved *by* the Law, but we are not saved *without* it.

Psalm 119 frequently links the Law and salvation in a single idea (cf. Ps. 119. 41; 123; 146; 155; 166). The Law is an *aid* to salvation, but not the *means* of it. All who are truly saved will hunger and thirst for the Law, that they might follow it as the path of salvation to ever greater blessings from God. Salvation is by the mercy of God (v. 41), not by our works. But, as we trust in the Law and all God's Word, our lives become an effective apologetic for our faith (v. 42). Thus, our souls cry out for more of God's salvation, looking to His Word to guide us more deeply into it (vv. 81, 82). The righteousness that comes with God's salvation awaits us in His Word; we should wear out our eyes seeking it from Him there (v. 123). They who are truly saved will keep the Law and testimonies of God (v. 146). They will find God's Law a delight, not a burden (v. 174). Only the wicked reject God's Law and set it far from them (v. 155). If we hope to know more of God's great salvation – exceedingly abundantly more than we've ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20) – we will discover it by obeying His commandments and all His Word (v. 166).

Thus the psalmist condensed the Old Testament teaching about the Law of God and how it relates to His salvation. And in so doing, he laid a foundation for us to build on in going deeper and with greater delight, joy, and fruitfulness into the merciful and gracious salvation of our God.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Keeping the Law doesn't save us. It is a good thing, too, because it is impossible for us to do. If that was the way to salvation, no one would ever be saved.

*Psalm 119: Introduction*

We are saved one way, and one way only. As Jesus so plainly told us, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14.6). It is only through Him. And then Paul expanded on this thought: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2.8, 9). A gift for which we are eternally thankful.

With that settled, what do we then do with the Law? Again, Jesus tells us where it fits in: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14.15). And “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (Jn. 15.14).

A yarn that Jesus spun for the chief priests and the elders sums it up pretty well: “But what do you think?” He asked them. “A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” (Matt. 21.28-31)

Even they got the gist of the story. It was the first son who did the will of his father. (Matt. 21.31) By doing the will of his father.

Moses’ words about the Law are striking: “For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days...” (Deut. 32.47).

Psalm 119 teaches us how to utilize and love and obey this Word of God. The Law leads us to salvation by showing us our wretchedness. And God gives us Jesus Christ, Who did keep the Law perfectly, to cover the fact that we cannot. We accept this gift. And then we go on to live our lives, daily being sanctified to be more and more pleasing to our heavenly Father Who does delight in His obedient children (Prov. 15.8, 9).

All our hope is written in the Word. (Ps. 119.81)

*For reflection*

1. Explain what it means to say that we’re not saved *by* the Law of God, but we’re not saved *without* it.
2. What’s the best way for you to learn the Law of God, so that you realize more of His great salvation (Ps. 1)?
3. Whom will you encourage today to walk more consistently in the Law of God?

*There is an eternal salvation all the saints long for, and therefore they pray that God would help their way to it. Let thy judgments help me; let all ordinances and all providences, (both are God’s judgments,) further me in glorifying God; let them help me for that work. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.176*

*Pray Psalm 119.81-83.*

Give thanks for the safety and comfort of your salvation and for the Word of God. Call on Him to show you, by His Word, the way to deliverance from any trials or troubles. Express your hope and confidence in Him and His Word.

*Sing Psalm 119.81-83.*

(Ripley: *Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah, O My Soul*)

My soul faints for Your salvation – but my hope is in Your Word!  
I have searched Your Word with patience seeking comfort from You, Lord.  
Like a wineskin, Lord, You test me; I am withered with despair!  
Let Your statutes my sweet rest be as I call on You in prayer.



### **3 The Life-Giving Law**

*Pray Psalm 119.88.*

Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,  
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

*Sing Psalm 119.88.*

(St. Anne: *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*)

According to Your righteousness, revive me, O my Lord!  
And thus shall I, revived by grace, obey Your holy Word.

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.88 and 159, 160.*

*Preparation*

1. What does the psalmist seek in these verses?
2. How does he regard the Law and Word of God?

*Meditation*

Jesus linked the words of His mouth to life itself: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life (Jn. 6.63). God Himself said the same thing about His Law: “You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD (Lev. 18.4, 5). Moses insisted on this as well and taught that the life-giving Law of God is the key to realizing all He has promised: “Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel, and he said to them: ‘Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. For it *is* not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess.’”

The composer of Psalm 119 also understood the life-giving power of the Law and Word of God. He called on God to “revive” him nine times throughout this psalm. The Hebrew word for “revive” is something more like, “cause me to live!” There is an urgency in it, as well as an understanding that, unless God is at work in us, willing and doing of His good pleasure, we cannot even exist!

We must not take for granted the life we have because of the lovingkindness of God, and especially not the new life we have in Jesus Christ. Let us thank God every day that we are alive, and let us seek Him for the power of His Word and Spirit to enrich our lives, indwell our lives, empower our lives, adorn our lives, transform our lives, and use the lives He has given us that others might truly live as well.

The psalmist would have us pray to be revived by turning to God and His Law and Word, so that the Spirit will work powerfully within us to enliven by grace and with truth every facet of our lives.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

“Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth” (Ps. 119.88).

This verse has a request and a purpose. I fear that today the verse is read with a different purpose.

Revive me according to Your lovingkindness:

So that I can be happy.

So that I can be healthy.

So that I can be rich.

So that all my spiritual, physical, and emotional needs are met.

But the purpose of this verse as God wants us to read it is inherently different. We long to be revived by His lovingkindness, so that we can keep His Law. Long and short, pure and simple; there it is. The only purpose for our revival.

“And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His Holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage” (Ez. 9.8). Revived to be enlightened to obey.

“Will You not revive again, that Your people may rejoice in You?” (Ps. 85.6) Revived to rejoice and obey.

“It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night” (Ps. 92.1, 2). Revived to give thanks to the LORD for His lovingkindness and His faithfulness, and to obey.

Ours is a circuitous life in the LORD. We request to be revived by His lovingkindness so that we will keep the Law. Keeping the Law causes us to be enlightened in God’s Word; to rejoice in our salvation and our revival; and to give thanks for His lovingkindness that revives us. And on it goes, causing us to be more like Jesus with every round of revival and obedience.

*More about Jesus let me learn,  
More of His holy will discern;  
Spirit of God, my teacher be,  
Showing the things of Christ to me.*

*More, more about Jesus, More, more about Jesus;  
More of His saving fulness see, More of His love who died for me.  
(Hewitt/Sweney, 1887)*

*For reflection*

1. How do you experience that “circuitous life in the LORD”?
2. Do you think the Church today is in need of revival? Explain.
3. Do you think if you spent more time meditating in God’s Law you would know more of the eternal life He longs to give you? Explain.

*[The psalmist] desires to be quickened, to testify that even in the midst of life he is dead, except in so far as he is sustained by the power of God. And assuredly, all who are duly acquainted with their own infirmity, esteeming their life as nothing, will crave to be quickened every moment. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.149*

*Pray Psalm 119.159, 160.*

Praise God for His Law and all His Word of truth. Seek His righteous judgments for the work of this day. Call on Him to revive and renew you in every aspect of your life.

*Sing Psalm 119.159, 160.*

*(Regent Square: Angels from the Realms of Glory)*

Lord, consider how I love the precepts of Your holy Word!  
All Your Word is truth forever, and your judgments, righteous Lord.  
O revive us! O revive us by Your kindness, loving Lord!

## 4 Word Power

*Pray Psalm 119.12-14.*

Blessed *are* You, O LORD!  
Teach me Your statutes.  
With my lips I have declared  
All the judgments of Your mouth.  
I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,  
*As much as* in all riches.

*Sing Psalm 119.12-14.*

(Passion Choral: *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)  
Be blessed, O God our Savior; teach us Your holy Word!  
Our lips proclaim with favor the statutes of the Lord.  
How great our joy, dear Jesus, to follow in Your ways.  
What more than this could please us, or brighten all our days?

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.1-3.*

*Preparation*

1. What is the state of those who walk in the ways of God's Law?
2. How does keeping the Law empower them?

*Meditation*

The New Testament speaks of the Scriptures in terms of power. Hebrews 4.12 asserts that the Word of God is living and powerful. Jesus understood the Word of God to have power to sanctify our lives (Jn. 17.17). Paul believed that looking into the Word of God could transform us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Such convictions are consistent with what the psalmist wrote concerning the Law and Word of God in Psalm 119. In his view, word power is at work in the Law of God to affect us in holy, righteous, good, peaceable, and joyous ways.

Walking in the Law of God and keeping His Word is the way to true happiness, erasing every defilement of soul and life, and strengthening us to resist temptation and the devil (vv. 1-3; 9-11; 67). The Word has power to comfort us in times of affliction (v. 50) and strengthen us in the face of mocking (v. 51). Reading and meditating on God's Law can fill us with a sense of delight to sustain us during trials (v. 92). The Word of God emboldens and sustains us during times of persecution (vv. 157, 161). It brings us such abiding and pervading peace that nothing can cause us to stumble in our way (v. 165).

No wonder the Law of God is looked to as a refuge or shelter, a place to resort to for understanding, wisdom, guidance, and power to obey (cf. vv. 76, 77, 114, 143). It is a never-failing source of divine grace to keep, sustain, empower, delight, and embolden us for obedience, come what may.

Thus God's Word is a true and reliable guide to life – full and abundant life in Jesus Christ (cf. vv. 9-11, 59, 60, 105). And so we pray, “Be blessed, O God, our Savior; teach us Your holy Word!”

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

To be blessed, I am told from a website, describes a believer as being in an enviable position for receiving God's provisions (favor) – an extension of His grace. And this is true. But it is hard to grasp all the nuances of being blessed. It is almost easier to understand when we consider a few of the antonyms for blessed:

condemned, damned, cursed, and disapproved. And we know for a fact, that we are none of those because of the gift of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ.

But the Bible explicitly tells us that we are blessed if we are:

1. Undeclared in the way.
2. Walking in the law of the Lord.
3. Keeping His testimonies.
4. Seeking Him with our whole heart.
5. Doing no iniquity.
6. Walking in His ways.

We are blessed by His grace. “For by grace you have been saved...” (Eph. 2.8). And we are blessed if we do His commandments. “Blessed are the undeclared in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!” (Ps. 119.1)

“Praise the LORD!  
Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,  
who delights greatly in His commandments” (Ps. 112.1).

“Blessed are those who walk not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
nor stands in the path of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and  
in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1.1, 2).

There is no getting around the connection between love for the Law of God, the doing of the Law of God, and being blessed by God Who is the giver of His Law.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
O, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
(Crosby/Knapp,1873)*

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain the idea of being “blessed” to a new believer?
2. What’s the connection between the blessings and power of God’s Word and obedience to God’s Word?
3. Given the connection between blessing, power, and obedience to God’s Word, what could you do to increase in the blessings and power of God?

*This psalm may be considered as the statement of a believer’s experience. As far as our views, desires, and affection agree with what is here expressed, they come from the influences of the Holy Spirit, and no further. The pardoning mercy of God in Christ, is the only source of a sinner’s happiness. And those are most happy, who are preserved most free from the defilement of sin, who simply believe God’s testimonies, and depend on his promises. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.1-8*

*Pray Psalm 1.1-3.*

Ask the Lord to increase in you the blessings of reading, meditating on, and studying His Word. Call on Him to let the power of the Word of God be at work in you today to will and do of His good pleasure.

*Sing Psalm 1.1-3.*

(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: Introduction*

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.

## 5 Learning God's Word (1)

*Pray Psalm 119.33-35.*

Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes,  
And I shall keep it to the end.  
Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law;  
Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart.  
Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,  
For I delight in it.

*Sing Psalm 119.33-35.*

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

Teach me, Lord, and help me follow in Your holy righteous way!  
I will keep Your statutes gladly, all your holy Law obey.  
Give me understanding, Jesus, guide me in Your path today!

Make me walk in Your commandments, let me keep Your holy part.  
I will keep Your Law unfailing; from it let me ne'er depart.  
For Your Word is my delight, Lord; help me keep it from the heart.

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.65-68.*

*Preparation*

1. What did the psalmist want God to do?
2. How did He expect to benefit from that?

*Meditation*

It stands to reason that anything so wondrous, so important to our salvation, so rich in teaching about justice and righteousness, and so necessary for enjoying full and abundant life would be worth knowing. But we cannot know the Law of God – nor any of His Word – without a disciplined attempt at learning. That should come natural to the followers of Jesus Christ. After all, the root meaning of “disciple” is “learner”. Jesus’ disciples follow *His* example and *learn, teach, and obey* the commandments of God (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

Psalm 119 expresses an eager desire to learn the Law of God. Learning God's Law gives us an upright heart full of praise for God (v. 7). We bless God by seeking to learn His statutes (v. 12). To improve our own ways, we look to God to teach us His (v. 26). We call on God to teach us His statutes so that we might keep them to the end (v. 33). We want to learn God's Law to tap into His abundant mercy (v. 64) and to have good judgment and knowledge (v. 66). We acknowledge that it is an expression of the mercy of God that He would deign to teach us His Law (v. 124). Learning God's Law makes us better able to worship Him (v. 171). And so on.

Let's note three things: First, if we are to learn God's Law, then we must submit to Him to teach us. That means poring over the Scriptures, comparing them with one another, waiting on the Lord to teach us His Word, and staying at this effort every day of our lives. Second, we will not take up such a discipline unless we truly *desire* to learn God's Word. And third, we have only truly learned the Law when we keep it. Continuously. Faithfully. Joyfully.

Like Jesus.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

God is good, and He always does good. Always. So the psalmist requests that God teach him how to be

good. Just like He is: “You are good, and do good, teach me Your statutes” (Ps. 119.68).

Paul, who told us to imitate him just like he imitated Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1), wrote about what being good looks like; and here is the list of practical activities for those of us who want to be good: “But the fruit of the Spirit [what goodness looks like acted out] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5. 22, 23).

And the really good news is, there is no law against behaving this way! Totally legal.

God has a suggestion for us about how to do this: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is. 1.16, 17).

First, we need to accept the gift of salvation. Then we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. Then we need to get busy about learning and doing the Law of God.

Somewhat cynically, this reminds us of the comedian Steve Martin’s schtick about how to become a millionaire: “First get a million dollars.” But for us, with the mandate to be holy, God supplies the means (the million dollars), the gift of the Holy Spirit, to get us where we need to be.

We just need to be willing. And we need to desire this above all else. “The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them” (Ps. 111.2). “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2.15).

The quote today from Matthew Henry bears repeating: “Those who know and love the law of the Lord, desire to know it more, and love it better. The way of serious godliness is the way of truth; the only true way to happiness: we must always have actual regard to it.” Enough said. Now let’s learn to be good.

*For reflection*

1. What are you doing to learn the Law and Word of God?
2. How can you help and encourage other believers to learn the Law and Word of God?
3. Whom will you encourage today? Why not share what you’re learning from our study of Psalm 119?

*Those who know and love the law of the Lord, desire to know it more, and love it better. The way of serious godliness is the way of truth; the only true way to happiness: we must always have actual regard to it. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.25-32*

*Pray Psalm 119.25-29, 39, 40.*

Pray that God’s Spirit will teach you His Law and all His Word. Call on Him to give you understanding of His ways, to relieve your soul from all heaviness, and to help you walk the path of His judgments and precepts.

*Sing Psalm 119.25-29, 39, 40*

*(All to Christ: Jesus Paid It All)*

My soul clings to the dust; grant life, Lord by Your Word!  
To You my ways I trust; teach me Your statutes, Lord.

*Refrain*

Make me understand; teach me, Lord, Your way.

In Your works I take my stand; Your Word will I obey.

*Psalm 119: Introduction*

My soul for sorrow wanes; grant strength, Lord, by Your Word!  
From false ways let me abstain: teach me Your Law, O Lord.

*Refrain*

The reproach that now I dread turn from me, Lord, I pray.  
Your Word I seek instead, and long for it all day.

*Refrain*



## 6 Learning God's Word (2)

*Pray Psalm 119.15, 16.*

I will meditate on Your precepts,  
And contemplate Your ways.  
I will delight myself in Your statutes;  
I will not forget Your word.

*Sing Psalm 119.15, 16.*

*(Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded)*

We contemplate Your precepts and cherish all Your ways,  
delighting in Your statutes, rememb'ring all our days.  
With wondrous bounty bless us, Your humble servants, Lord,  
that we may live with Jesus and keep His holy Word.

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.9-16.*

*Preparation*

1. What did the psalmist resolve concerning the Word of God?
2. How would you describe his attitude toward the Word?

*Meditation*

We must not think that learning God's Law and all His Word is merely an external discipline, something we "patch on" because we think we should or because we want others to see our "righteousness".

Learning God's Law so that we obey it faithfully day by day is an inward discipline, reaching and transforming the soul in all its parts – heart, mind, and conscience. We see this even in the few verses we're meditating on today: "I will...": a firm priority settled in the conscience. "...in my heart..." and "...delight myself...": the disposition of the heart toward God's Law. "I will meditate...contemplate...not forget": the mind embracing new understanding and perspectives.

The rest of Psalm 119 elaborates on this commitment to learn from the depths of our soul (cf. vv. 20, 28, 81, 129, 135, 175). We must diligently apply our minds to understanding God's Law and allowing it to shape the way we think about our lives, pleading with God for understanding, so that increasingly the Word of God becomes our permanent vantage point on life (cf. vv. 16, 27, 34, 73, 125, 130). As we see the wisdom, beauty, simplicity, and love embedded in the Law of God, He will shape our hearts to love and delight in it more and more (cf. vv. 24, 34, 36, 47, 69, 70, 97, 112, 140). The more our minds are shaped by God's Word and our hearts find it truly to be their supreme joy and rejoicing (Jer. 15.16), the more permanently that Word will be fixed in our conscience, to shape and guard God's values and priorities in our will (cf. 14, 72, 127, 128, 145).

The apostle Paul exhorts us to let the Word of God dwell in us richly (Col. 3.16), in all the chambers and components of the soul. For when we attend carefully and diligently to settling the Word in our mind, heart, and conscience, obeying it and gaining the blessing God promises will be genuine, consistent, and sure.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

In the first pages of the book *Hope Against Hope*, written by Nadezhda Mandelstam, is a tribute to her, *An Obituary* (1899-1980), written by Joseph Brodsky. In it he explains about how she committed to memory all her husband's (the poet Osip Mandelstam) works, and the works of her friend and fellow poet Anna Akhmatova. They were Russian poets, writing against the cruelty of those in power. "Paper, in general, was dangerous. What strengthened the bond of that marriage as well as of that friendship was a technicality: the

necessity to commit to memory what could not be committed to paper, i.e., the poems of both authors.”

This is what the psalmist wants us to do with God’s Words. His Words, hidden in our heart, will remind us how not to sin against God. They will keep us from wandering away from our heavenly Father (Ps. 119. 10, 11).

We are blessed beyond measure that these precious Words of God are written on paper, and we can read these words daily, continually, and judiciously. We are still free to do that. We read. We rejoice. We meditate in and contemplate these Words. We delight. We must never forget these Words. Ever. For indeed, they are the joy and rejoicing of our heart. “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer. 15.16).

At some time in our future we may not have the benefit of reading God’s Word. That freedom may be taken from us as it has been taken from so many during the course of human history. If a woman committed to memory all the works of her husband and her friend so future generations could know and read them, should not we strive to commit as much of God’s Word to memory as we can? For many of the same reasons?

And even if the Word of God is never taken from us, we should whole-heartedly be reading this Word daily, to hide in our hearts these most lovely, and excellent, and beautiful words of God. For how else will we know how to please Him?

*For reflection*

1. What role does Scripture memory play in your own reading and study of God’s Word?
2. How can memorizing Scripture help you in your walk with and work for the Lord?
3. What can you do to make sure your entire soul – mind, heart, and conscience – is engaged in your reading and study of Scripture?

*God’s word is treasure worth laying up, and there is no laying it up safe but in our hearts, that we may oppose God’s precepts to the dominion of sin, his promises to its allurements, and his threatenings to its violence. Let this be our plea with him to teach us his statutes, that, being partakers of his holiness, we may also partake of his blessedness. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.9-16*

*Pray Psalm 119.171-176*

Pray that God will grant you a greater measure of His salvation as you read and study His Word. Give Him praise and thanks for what you read today. Pray for an opportunity to share what you’ve read. Ask the Lord to guide your steps and to keep you from straying into sin.

*Sing Psalm 119.171-176.*

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)

With our lips we praise You, Jesus, for You teach us, full and free.  
Now Your Word will ever please us; Your commandments true shall be.  
Let Your hand come forth to ease us; we Your Word choose gratefully!

For Your saving grace we plead, Lord, and Your Law is our delight.  
We to live and praise You need, Lord, all Your help by day and night.  
Straying sheep, we do not heed, Lord; come and seek us by Your might!

## 7 Scripture Enchiridion

*Pray Psalm 119.33-35.*

Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes,  
And I shall keep it to the end.  
Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law;  
Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.  
Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,  
For I delight in it.

*Sing Psalm 119.33-35.*

(Regent Square: *Angels from the Realms of Glory*)  
Teach me, Lord, and help me follow in Your holy righteous way!  
I will keep Your statutes gladly, all your holy Law obey.  
Give me understanding, Jesus, guide me in Your path today!

Make me walk in Your commandments, let me keep Your holy part.  
I will keep Your Law unfailing; from it let me ne'er depart.  
For Your Word is my delight, Lord; help me keep it from the heart.

*Read and meditate on Psalm 119.33-35.*

*Preparation*

1. What did the psalmist ask of God?
2. Why did he ask that?

*Meditation*

An enchiridion is “a book containing essential information on a subject” (*OED*). The origins of this word go back to ancient Greek in which “en” means “within” and “chir” or “kheir” means “hand.” We might think of a guidebook that one holds in his hand as he walks through a city, looking at the book as it explains the major buildings and roads, architectural wonders, or the historical significance of a place. You’ll want to keep that book “in hand” to help you gain the most from your walking tour.

This is how I think of Psalm 119 in relation to the rest of God’s Word. Psalm 119 is a guidebook or handbook for helping us gain the most from Scripture. As we have seen, it encourages us to read, study, and meditate on all God’s Word so that we might walk in a manner pleasing to Him and gain the most from our great salvation. I find it helpful to come to Scripture each day through the pages of this enchiridion. By reading and praying through a section of Psalm 119, we prepare our soul for reading and meditating on whatever passages may be the focus of our daily devotions. Each of the 22 sections of Psalm 119 reminds us why we read Scripture, how we should read it, what we might expect from our study, and that we should compare our daily reading with other parts of Scripture. As they are also prayers, they connect us with God before we plunge into our walking tour through some part of His Word. Each section also encourages us to seek the Lord Jesus in Scripture, for He is the fullness of God’s Word and is to be found in every part of the Bible (Jn. 5.39).

Psalm 119, more than any other passage of Scripture, can focus and guide us in gaining the most out of all God’s Word. Take it in hand to guide your reading and study of all God’s Word.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

An enchiridion is “a book containing essential information on a subject.” And the word *essential* is defined as something absolutely necessary and extremely important. Synonyms for essential are critical, imperative,

indispensable, integral, must-have, needed, required, and requisite.

The Word of God is essential for our well-being. That's a given.

But how essential does it seem to us? How critical to our life and work is studying the Bible? Is it imperative to our success as believers? Does God see that we find His Word indispensable?

The psalmist in verses 33-35 pleads with the LORD to:

1. Teach me the way of Your statutes.
2. Give me understanding.
3. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments.

And the reason he pleads for these things is so that:

1. I will keep Your statutes to the end of my life.
2. I will keep Your law.
3. I will observe it with my whole heart.
4. I will delight in Your commandments.

Jesus tells us to "hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev. 2.25, 26). "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1.7).

But we will not have this power, or love, or that sound mind apart from dwelling in the enchiridion of God's Word. It is essential and sustaining. "My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23.11, 12).

As Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4.4).

We must be careful to observe all the words of this Law. "For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life..." (Deut. 32.46, 47).

The Ultimate Enchiridion.

*For reflection*

1. What do we mean by saying Psalm 119 is an enchiridion for the rest of the Bible?
2. What do we mean by saying that the Bible is an enchiridion for life?
3. What do you most hope to gain from our study of Psalm 119?

*God, by his Spirit, gives a right understanding. But the Spirit of revelation in the word will not suffice, unless we have the Spirit of wisdom in the heart. God puts his Spirit within us, causing us to walk in his statutes...Quicken me in thy way; to redeem time, and to do every duty with liveliness of spirit.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 119.33-40*

*Pray Psalm 119.41-44.*

Commit yourself to obeying whatever God shows you in His Word. Ask Him to give you an opportunity to share His Word with someone today.

*Sing Psalm 119.41-44.*

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

*Psalm 119: Introduction*

Let Your mercies come to me, Your salvation by Your Word.  
From reproaches set me free, for I trust in You, O Lord.  
Let my life an answer be for those who may question me.

Let my words be Your words, Lord; strengthen me to keep Your Law.  
All my hope is in Your Word, and I seek Your precepts all.  
Let me ever keep Your Word, for I trust in You, O Lord!

*Psalm 119: Introduction*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. What makes Psalm 119 so important? In what sense is Psalm 119 a “Scripture Enchiridion”?
2. How does Psalm 119 teach us to think about salvation and the Law of God?
3. What do we mean by saying that learning God’s Law and all His Word is an “inward discipline”?
4. How can we know when we have truly learned the Word of God?
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

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.