

PSALM 119.97-104

psalm
God's Word 119

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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Psalm 119.97-104
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Introduction to Psalm 119.97-104

In this stanza of Psalm 119 the psalmist emphasizes the need to love God and His Word if we're going to stay on His pathway – the pathway of blessedness.

The stanza is constructed within an *inclusio* which allows the psalmist to focus on his main theme, which is loving God's Law. He has applied himself diligently to the Law, more than his teachers and all the ancients, so he believes God will protect him from all his foes.

He just needs to guard his steps, every step of the way. And so do we.

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 Have It, Love It

Pray Psalm 119.97.

Oh, how I love Your law!
It *is* my meditation all the day.

Sing Psalm 119.97, 98.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verse 97.

Preparation

1. What was the psalmist's attitude toward God's Law?
2. What did he do with it?

Meditation

Back in the days when I was first learning Hebrew, building vocabulary was an important task. I tried to associate words I was learning with familiar English things or ideas suggested by whatever word I was trying to memorize. So for the Hebrew word, "to love", which is אָהַב, *ab-HAHV*, I thought of "I have" and holding something close to my heart, so that it was *in* my heart. To this day, when I read this word, I think of holding Susie close to my heart and saying, "I *have* her!" That is, I *love* her.

The *n* (*mem*) stanza is neatly bookended with two opposite yet complementary and valid affections: love and hate. So it forms an *inclusio*. As we shall see, "hate" is not a four-letter word. We need both love and hate to walk the pathway of righteousness.

But love is the starting point and ending point. If we love God's Law – and all His Word – we will hide it in our heart (Ps. 119.9-11). We will cling to the Word of God (Ps. 119.31) holding it close through meditation, thinking about and pondering it all day long (Ps. 1). That's the sense of that Hebrew exclamation, "Oh". We have received the Word as a gift from God, a gift that brings the protocols, priorities, power, and practices of heaven into our daily lives (Ps. 119.89). God has given us His Law as a gift of love, and we embrace and obey it to show Him our gratitude and love.

You have the Word. Love it. Meditate on it day by day so that it buries itself in your soul and you overflow with love for Jesus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.16.

"Oh, how I love Your law!" (Ps. 119.97)

God's Law is like a cast that keeps a broken leg steady and in place.

It is like a fence that keeps young children safe and away from the busy street.

It is like a pan that holds dough so it can rise and bake into a lovely loaf of bread.

It guides, protects, and promotes growth, maturity, and life (Deut. 32.46, 47).

But for us to reap the benefits of the Law, we need first to know it, and then to cherish it. We think about it all day long. "It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119.97).

Psalm 119.97-104

We should be continually asking ourselves:

Does this thought I'm thinking show Jesus that I love Him? (Jn. 14.15)

Does this behavior that I'm contemplating prove my undying love for my Savior? (Jn. 15.14)

Did that action taken (Ex. 20.8-17) proclaim to the world, and to my loving Lord, that I have taken His Name as mine and long to live each moment of my day in honor of Him and for His glory? (Ex. 20.1-7)

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can love the Law of God. We will learn the Law and meditate on it. Our behavior will begin to match our beliefs. We will be loving God in a way that resonates with His heart. We will know Him and know what pleases Him. We will be able to say with the psalmist David:

“I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises.

I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me?

I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away;

It shall not cling to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me;

I will not know wickedness” (Ps. 101.1-4)

We will “have it, love it”, and do it.

For reflection

1. How can you remind yourself throughout the day to love the Law of God?

2. Why is it important that you do so?

3. How can you encourage your fellow believers to love the Word of God throughout the day?

What we love, we love to think of. All true wisdom is from God. A good man carries his Bible with him, if not in his hands, yet in his head and in his heart. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.97

Pray Psalm 119.103, 104.

Pray that God will make His Word increasingly sweet to you. Call on Him throughout the day to guard you from evil.

Sing Psalm 119.103, 104.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your words are sweet unto my taste, the sweetest taste that e'er could be!

I hate and loathe all evil ways; give understanding, Lord, to me.

2 Sweet and Sour

Pray Psalm 119.103, 104.

How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

Sing Psalm 119.103, 104.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your words are sweet unto my taste, the sweetest taste that e'er could be!
I hate and loathe all evil ways; give understanding, Lord, to me.

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verses 103, 104.

Preparation

1. How does the psalmist express his attitude toward God's Word?
2. What is his attitude toward false teaching?

Meditation

I thought we should “skip to the end” of this stanza to pick up on the *inclusio* which organizes verses 97-104. It begins in love – for God's Word – and ends in hatred – for false ways. These affections are two sides of the same coin: Love God and His Word and you will hate all forms of evil (Ps. 97.10).

But don't miss the brilliant way the psalmist reprises verse 97 in verse 103. Here, instead of just telling us he loves God's words, he uses a “sticky” trope to run-up to verse 104. “Sticky” because, well, honey is not only sweet, it's also sticky to the touch. And “sticky” because this is the kind of comparison that will stick with you. Meditate on the taste of honey as you pray through the Ten Commandments. The next time you eat honey, recall God's words, and delight in them.

After the sweet comes the sour. Or rather, the downright bitter. Love God's precepts and they will give you understanding into all knowledge, wisdom, and discernment. Then you'll see wickedness and false ways for what they really are – bitter, even poisonous to the taste. Thus, in the sweetness of God's Word and the understanding it brings, you will hate what God hates (Rev. 2.6).

Love God's Word. Meditate on it throughout the day (v. 97) until it is sweet to your soul (v. 103) and yields true understanding for your path (v. 104). If you truly savor God's Word in this manner, you will hate false ways (v. 104), so that you will not so much as “taste” of them, but rather, turn away from them all.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

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

We have been told from the very beginning of this psalm how to get understanding. Through His precepts. We have also been warned from the beginning that “the proud have [us] in great derision” (Ps. 119.51), and that there will be wicked people in our lives who forsake God's law (Ps. 119.53). We are allowed to hate the false ways that rear up to take us down (Ps. 119.104).

While working diligently in her Personal Mission Field, our daughter Kristy realized that some of those in it might respond better with a different mode of learning. Some that she had been handing the Word of God to on a silver platter, she felt, might need the tactile experience of searching the Word out for themselves. Thus,

she started teaching a wonderful study in the book of John and sends it out daily via text. She is a great Bible teacher and so I asked to be included.

John 10.9, 10 is a glorious overlay to Psalm 119.104. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Here are Kristy's study questions that so vividly bring to life both passages:

1. Who will be saved?
2. What do you think it means to find pasture?
3. What pasture has been provided in your life?
4. What three things does the thief do to the sheep?
5. Is there a personal thief in your life?
6. Who can truly keep you safe from the thief?
7. What does it mean to you that not only will Jesus give you life, but that He came to give you a full life?
8. What does a full life in Jesus look like to you?

Kristy summed it up this way: "A full life happens when we despise the things we should despise, like the thief in our life, and love and follow the truth and protection found in Jesus."

"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" (Ps. 119.1-3).

Embrace the sweet life found within His precepts and pasture.
Exclude the sour of the thief's false way.

"Love God's Word."

For reflection

1. What does it mean for you to hate sin? What can you do to make sure that continues to be the case?
2. Would you say that God's Word is "sweeter than honey" to you? Explain.
3. Christians need to help one another resist the temptation to sin. How will you do this today?

The soul has its tastes as well as the body. Our relish for the word of God will be greatest, when that for the world and the flesh is least. The way of sin is a wrong way; and the more understanding we get by the precepts of God, the more rooted will be our hatred of sin; and the more ready we are in the Scriptures, the better furnished we are with answers to temptation. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Psalm 119.103, 104*

Pray Psalm 119.97.

Thank the Lord for His Word. Be specific. How many different reasons can you think to thank the Lord for His Word. Call on Him for wisdom for the coming day.

Sing Psalm 119.97, 98.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

3 With Us Always

Pray Psalm 119.98.

You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;
For they are ever with me.

Sing Psalm 119.97, 98.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verse 98.

Preparation

1. How did the psalmist become wise?
2. How wise did he become?

Meditation

This verse has an interesting construction. It begs the question: To what does “they” refer? The commandments of God? The enemies of the psalmist? Who or what was with the psalmist forever?

We need to digress a bit to answer that question. Hebrew pronouns (“they”) can be masculine, feminine, or neuter in form. They always have an antecedent, and the form of that noun must agree with the gender of the pronoun. The Hebrew word here translated “they” is a bit misleading. The correct translation is “she” and, even though it is singular, it can refer either to “enemies” or “commandments”.

However, only one of these will be with us always.

The psalmist says God makes him wiser than his enemies “*from* (not *through*) Your commandments”. Wisdom comes from the commandments of God. We are called to seek wisdom, to desire it above all earthly things. And we may expect to encounter wisdom *from* the commandments of God, because our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the very Treasury of wisdom and knowledge, meets us and speaks to us there, (Jn. 5.39), showing His glory as in a mirror and transforming us into His own image and likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The enemy of our soul is always seeking new ways to work his wiles against us. But the commandments of God make us wiser than our enemies, and wiser than all those who would oppose or oppress us. We must study and learn the commandments of God so that they will always be with us, yielding wisdom for all aspects of life. The commandments which yield the wisdom of God are our constant companions, even after all our enemies have been destroyed forever.

Just as the Wisdom of God promised (Matt. 28.20).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Psalm 119.98 is a verse that would make a great *round* like “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” (disclaimer: does not work with said tune):

Your commandments are ever with me
So I'm wiser than my enemies because
Your commandments are ever with me
So I'm wiser than my enemies (ad infinitum).

When we think of wisdom the name Solomon always comes to mind. God gave Solomon the opportunity to

ask for anything to rule his country successfully, and he chose wisdom: “Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil” (1 Kgs. 3.9). Although our scope of needed wisdom is not as broad as Solomon’s we would do well to ask for God’s wisdom to discern between good and evil. Because that is the goal of our walk with the Lord. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23).

But of course Jesus is “the very treasury of wisdom and knowledge.” And from Him we learn to follow the commandments of God. He said of Himself, “The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12.42). (It is, as an example, so interesting and amusing to see how Jesus worked the wisdom of Proverbs 26.4, 5 into His earthly ministry with some of His enemies).

Only from reading the Word of God will we learn Jesus and see how He followed God’s Law to perfection. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation...For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself...” (Col. 1.15, 19, 20). “Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him...who has been perfected forever” (Heb. 8.25, 28).

We see Him in all the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation. We read of His work with the Father and of His prophesied coming to earth in the Old Testament. We read about His earthly life in the Gospels. We see His Spirit’s work throughout the rest of the New Testament. And we read about His imminent return to judge the world and take all His followers to a new heaven and a new earth. And we say with Job, “I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19. 26, 27). Not only to see Him, but to be like Him.

All this wisdom that comes from God, “who gives to all liberally and without reproach” (Jms. 1.5) allows us to overcome our enemies because we use all the Word of God, and His commandments to wage war against them.

We are, after all, wiser than they
because God’s commandments are ever with us!

For reflection

1. The psalmist keeps pointing to God’s Law, which points to God and His wisdom. What should we learn from this?
2. How will you protect yourself today from the wiles and machinations of spiritual enemies?
3. Whom can you encourage today to seek the wisdom of God in His Word?

He surpassed his enemies, because their cunning and artifices availed them nothing when they employed these to the utmost to effect his destruction. The malice of the wicked is always goading them to do mischief; and as they are often artful and deceitful, we are afraid lest our simplicity should be imposed upon by their deceits, unless we use the same crafts and underhand dealings which they practice. Accordingly, the prophet glories, that he found in God’s law enough to enable him to escape all their snares. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.98

Pray Psalm 119.99.

Thank God that His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, is with you always. Commit yourself to following Him today in each of the activities before you.

Psalm 119.97-104

Sing Psalm 119.99.

(Truro: [*Shout for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your Word is with me ever more; it fills my soul and guides my hand.
More than all those who've gone before Your holy Law I understand.

4 Good Teachers?

Pray Psalm 119.99.

I have more understanding than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.

Sing Psalm 119.99.

(Truro: [Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns](#))

Your Word is with me ever more; it fills my soul and guides my hand.
More than all those who've gone before Your holy Law I understand.

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verse 99.

Preparation

1. How good a student was the psalmist?
2. What did learn, and how?

Meditation

The psalmist, it appears, had good teachers. Not only did he receive from them the essential content of the Word of God, but also, they instilled in him such a hunger, desire, longing, and taste for the Word that he continued in it and surpassed in understanding all he'd learned from them, and even all they knew to teach him.

Don't you wish you had some teachers like that?

Good teachers don't just teach. They equip. They furnish learners with the desire to learn, the reasons why they should learn, a conviction for ongoing learning, and the basic equipment to persist in it. The psalmist's teachers had done this for him. Especially, it seems, he learned the value of meditating in the precepts and teachings of the Lord. Reading them slowly. Asking questions. Thinking deeply. Listening for the Spirit to cue up other Scriptures, point out some area of needed change in his life, suggest a new approach to journeying on the pathway of God. Meditating.

“Understanding” here means more than intellectual agreement. It indicates the complete involvement of soul and life in the object of study. Other words to translate the Hebrew here are prudence, wisdom, attending to, and having skill. Understanding that only affects the mind is not true understanding; it's just memory. True understanding enlightens the mind, engages the heart, sinks into the conscience, and works out in a transformed life.

Seek understanding of God's Word. And look for good teachers to help you learn.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

All of that is indeed true and is a very positive way to interpret this verse. But it seems to me there could be another way to look at it. Well, maybe just the flipside of how it could be.

What if a person was under the tutelage of teachers who were not engaged fully in the Word of God? What if a person's pastor was not truly preaching the whole gospel of the Kingdom of God? Or what if a Christian student was sitting in the classroom of a rank unbeliever who was trying to foist upon them things antithetical to God and His Word?

Wouldn't it be possible that this person, who in immersed in God's teaching, might have more understanding of the truth than these teachers/preachers?

Those who do not meditate on the Word lack in understanding:
“They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are unstable” (Ps. 82.5).

Those who do meditate in God’s Word are more adept at understanding:
“A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it,
but knowledge is easy to him who understands” (Prov. 14.6).
“The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way,
but the folly of fools is deceit” (Prov. 14.8).
“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding,
but he who is impulsive exalts folly” (Prov. 14.29).
“Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding,
but what is in the heart of fools is made known” (Prov. 14.33).

Jesus, even as a twelve year old, had more understanding than the teachers in the temple: “Now it was that after three days [his parents] found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking the questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Lk. 2.46, 47).

This understanding will only come to us when we are meditating day and night (Ps. 1.2) in God’s Word. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3.16, 17).

And into our Personal Mission Fields we humbly go with more understanding than some, but bearing this mandate: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (Jms. 3.13).

Even this flip-side version demands love for, and obedience to, God’s Law.

For reflection

1. How would you describe your attitude toward learning the Law and Word of God?
2. Who cares about wisdom these days? Why do we need wisdom? Why do we need the Word of God to lead us to wisdom?
3. What are some of your goals for learning the Word of God?

By meditation on God’s testimonies we understand more than our teachers, when we understand our own hearts. The written word is a more sure guide to heaven, than all the fathers, the teachers, and ancients of the church. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Psalm 119.97-104

Pray Psalm 119.103, 104.

Pray that God would increase your delight in His Word. That you would hunger for it increasingly, savor it more deeply, and share it more enthusiastically.

Sing Psalm 119.103, 104.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your words are sweet unto my taste, the sweetest taste that e’er could be!
I hate and loathe all evil ways; give understanding, Lord, to me.

5 A Word So Deep

Pray Psalm 119.100.

I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep Your precepts.

Sing Psalm 119.99, 100.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your Word is with me ever more; it fills my soul and guides my hand.
More than all those who've gone before Your holy Law I understand.

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verse 100.

Preparation

1. How did the psalmist assess his understanding?
2. What was the source of this?

Meditation

The psalmist is stretching out a parallelism that began in the preceding verse and is identified by the phrase translated “more than” in NKJV. He understood “more than” his teachers by clinging to the Law of God. That’s quite an achievement. Or perhaps not. As we saw in our previous installment, it all depends on the teachers to whom you submit, whether they are good teachers or poor.

But even to excel *good* teachers is no mean achievement, and it tells us how much deeper, vaster, and more powerful and transforming the precepts of God are.

But to excel “the ancients” – all the great teachers, elders, prophets, theologians, and writers – of the past, now that is truly significant. The psalmist was not talking so much about himself as he was about the Word of God. Because he had the Word, loved it, read and meditated in it, delighted in and kept it, he was plugged into a resource for life that exceeds all the wisdom and understanding of all those who had gone before.

The works of writers just from the period of the early Church (to about 500 AD) is available in three collections. In hardback, they are in 8½ by 11 volumes, printed in two columns in 8-point type and run to 38 volumes of around 300 pages each. Add to these the writings of the medieval period, the Reformation, and the modern era, as well as all the books and journals and web articles published by all Christian writers every year, in every language, and you have perhaps thousands of times more literature than the early Church.

That’s a lot to master. But the Bible is more. And we – mystery of mysteries! – have the Spirit to lead us into the depths of Scripture and refresh us from its many pools and rivulets. And there’s no end to it. It’s just water of life without end. Focus on mastering the Scriptures and you’ll be surprised how much more you will understand about everything.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The Word gives understanding. Being filled with the Holy Spirit makes the Word even clearer. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can understand what we must do to please the Father. That is essential for our understanding and our obedience.

Jesus’ words about the powerful messenger John the Baptist shed some light on the meaning of Psalm 119:100: “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Lk. 7.28). We are recipients of the power of the risen Christ’s Spirit and the Kingdom of God. This is an awesome gift but comes with great obligations.

John the Baptist was the greatest of the ancients, filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb (Lk. 1.15); and yet, there is something even greater about the life we can live through the power of the risen Savior and His indwelling, Kingdom-bringing Spirit. Daily being in the Word, daily taking up our cross, and daily following of Jesus—keeping God’s precepts unto holiness—is the only way to know this life.

Elihu, a friend of Job’s, said to him: “I am young in years, and you are very old; therefore I was afraid, and dared not declare my opinion to you. I said, ‘Age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.’ But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged always understand justice” (Job 32.6-9). The difference will be found in the one, young or old, who is steeped in the power of the Word.

We, too, can be a source of this understanding for those in our Personal Mission Field. But we must be immersed in the Word, like a tea bag is hot water, so that we are flavorful and strong, not lukewarm and weak (Rev. 3.16).

Like our psalmist, “Because he had the Word, loved it, read and meditated in it, delighted in and kept it, he was plugged into a resource for life that exceeds all the wisdom and understanding of all those who had gone before.”

We can do this as well, because we have the Helper (Jn. 14.16 17; 15.26, 27).

For reflection

1. Why do we need the Spirit of God to help us understand and obey God’s Law?
2. What does the Spirit do in us that we cannot do on our own? Why does this make daily time in God’s Word so very important?
3. Whom will you encourage today with what the Lord has taught you in His Word? What has the Lord taught you in His Word?

... he means to affirm, that whoever yields himself with docility to God, keeps his thoughts in subjection to his word, and exercises himself diligently in meditating upon the Law, will thence derive wisdom sufficient for enabling him to consult his own safety in opposition to the stratagems of his enemies, to exercise circumspection requisite for escaping their deceits; and, finally, to match with the most eminent masters through the whole course of his life. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.95

Pray Psalm 119.97, 98, 103, 104.

Thank God for His Word and the protection it affords against false teaching, temptation, and the attacks of spiritual foes. Savor your time in God’s Word today. Ask Him to set His Word deep into your soul, and let it grow there.

Sing Psalm 119.97, 98, 103, 104.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

Your words are sweet unto my taste, the sweetest taste that e’er could be!
I hate and loathe all evil ways; give understanding, Lord, to me.

6 God's Pathway

Pray Psalm 119.101, 102.

I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
I have not departed from Your judgments,
For You Yourself have taught me.

Sing Psalm 119.101, 102.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

I guard my steps from evil ways that I may keep Your holy Word.
I keep Your judgments for Your praise, for You my Teacher are, O Lord!

Read Psalm 119.97-104; meditate on verses 101, 102.

Preparation

1. What did the psalmist do in keeping God's Law?
2. How was he able to do that?

Meditation

Keeping the Law of God requires continuous attention. We need to “walk circumspectly”, as Paul would say (Eph. 5.15), paying attention to what we're thinking, doing, proposing, and saying. Life is a journey toward the Presence of God forever. The lover of God wants to walk each step of that journey in the pathway God has marked out for us. That way we know God's Presence and pleasure here and now, which serves to increase our anticipation of being with Him forever then and there.

But our natural bent – since the law of sin still operates in us (Rom. 7.21) – is to consider other paths, to want to detour into what seem to more alluring ways, and to wander or be drawn away from the path of righteousness.

So we have to *restrain* those evil inclinations (v. 101): See the evil and just say “No!” Keep your spiritual sensors on continuous alert so that you don't drift, wander, or depart God's path (v. 102). Learn God's Law so completely and delight in it so fully that it tunes your conscience to hold to the Lord's pathway and reject all other ways.

The Spirit of God is writing the Law of God on our hearts (Ezek. 36.26, 27), giving us new desires and aspirations, and a new map from which we must not depart. On the pathway to the eternal Presence of God there is only one exit ramp. You will recognize it by the brightness of Christ's glory under the lamp of God's Law; and if you pay careful attention, you will hear, all along your pilgrim's journey, the Spirit saying continually to you, “This is the way; walk in it” (Is. 30.21).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162).

Isn't it absolutely incredible that God would be our Teacher? That He would be with us along the way saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (Is. 30.21), is astonishing, any way you look at it.

The way the psalmist phrases it is so astute. He doesn't just opine that God taught him; or the Spirit informed me; or I learned this from the Lord. No. He says emphatically, “You Yourself have taught me” (Ps. 119.102).

But there is something we need to do to put ourselves in His classroom—restrain our behavior from every evil way, and never depart from His judgments (Ps. 119.101, 102).

Psalm 119.33-40 contains the prerequisite activities to attain a seat in the study group:

1. We have requested to be taught by Him.
2. We have asked for understanding to keep His law.
3. We have wanted Him to make us walk in the path of His commandments.
4. We have leaned into His testimonies and made them our own.
5. We have stopped looking at worthless things and set our minds to work.
6. We have appealed as His servants that He would establish His word in us.
7. We have desired that He forgive our sins and look on us with mercy.
8. We applied His percepts in our life so that He would revive us in grace.

“In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity;
and by the fear of the LORD *one* departs from evil” (Prov. 16.6).

Now we’re ready to don our backpack, get our lunch box, and set out to His school.

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3.14, 18).

On God’s pathway to learning the sweetest Words ever written or taught to mankind (Ps. 119.103).

For reflection

1. What should you expect to learn while you are in the Holy Spirit’s “classroom”? How will you know when you’ve learned it?
2. How can you prepare yourself each day to restrain your sinful tendencies and keep within the pathway of the Lord?
3. What does it mean for you to “walk circumspectly” throughout the day?

From this we learn the profitable lesson, that in order to our keeping God's Law, we must, from the commencement, beware lest our feet should step aside into crooked by-paths; for with a nature so corrupted as ours is, amidst so many allurements, and with minds so fickle, we are in the greatest danger of being led astray; yea, it is a rare miracle if any man hold on in his life in a right course, without turning aside in one direction or another. The faithful, therefore, have need to exercise the greatest circumspection, in order to keep their feet from going astray. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Psalm 119.101*

Pray Psalm 119.97-100.

Thank God for what His Spirit is teaching you about the Word. Ask Him for wisdom beyond what you’ve ever known to live that Word, in the power of the Spirit, in all your walk and work today.

Sing Psalm 119.97-100.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

Your Word is with me ever more; it fills my soul and guides my hand.
More than all those who’ve gone before Your holy Law I understand.

7 A Love/Hate Thing

Pray Psalm 119.97, 104.

Oh, how I love Your law!
It is my meditation all the day...
Through Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

Sing Psalm 119.97, 98, 104.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

O, how I love Your Law, O Lord! I ponder it throughout the day.
The wisdom of Your holy Word keeps all my fiercest foes at bay.

Your words are sweet unto my taste, the sweetest taste that e'er could be!
I hate and loathe all evil ways; give understanding, Lord, to me.

Read Psalm 119.89-96; meditate on verses 97, 104.

Preparation

1. What affections are in play here?
2. To what is each directed?

Meditation

We recall that the Holy Spirit is writing the Law of God on our hearts (Ezek. 36.26, 27). So we need to get the basics right that they may govern and direct all our learning. And the basics are quite simple: Love God and His Word; hate evil and every false way. Write that fifty times on the back of your eyelids.

In his great work, *A Treatise on Religions Affections*, Jonathan Edwards explains that the heart deploys two kinds of affections in doing its work in the soul. First, there are those affections that draw us to something, the chief of which is love. Others would be interest, sympathy, compassion, kindness, and so forth. The second kind of affections are those which cause us to be repulsed by something, and the chief of these is hate. Other such affections would be disgust, indignation, outrage, and so forth. We need both kinds of affections, and we see that here in Psalm 119.97-104.

Make sure you love God and His Law so that you stay focused on His path, meditating on and understanding what His Word requires (vv. 97, 99), keeping to His way (vv. 100-102), remembering what you've been taught (v. 102), and thus growing to love God's Word even more (v. 103). See how all these verses engage those "attracting" affections?

At the same time, we must keep those affections in play that turn us away from things: the ploys, schemes, threats, or enticements of our enemies (v. 98); the allure of evil paths (v. 101); and all false ways (v. 104). These we must hate and despise, and if we do, our love for God and His Law will enable us to grow through every temptation, trouble, or trial, and to find His Law sweeter than anything else.

Walking God's pathway is a love/hate thing. Be sure you keep each in proper focus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"Prepare your outside work,
make it fit for yourself in the field; and
afterward build your house" (Prov. 24.27).

The order of operations in mathematics is the sequence in which a problem is solved. In everything we do some activity comes first, then other activities follow.

The same is true for these verses: First, I love God's Law and meditate in it all the day long (Ps. 119.97). Then, I get understanding, which clues me into false ways and evil that I should hate. (Ps. 119.104)

"How much better to get wisdom than gold!

And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver" (Prov. 16.16).

Wisdom said, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength...I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me" (Prov. 8.13, 14, 17).

The Law teaches us the order of operations for our lives so that we get the Love/Hate Thing right:

First, we love God more than anything or anyone else in the world.

We solemnly take on the name of Christian with sincerity—not in vain.

We remember to rest in the Lord one special day a week.

That sums up love for God.

Second, we hate disrespect for parents.

We hate murder.

We hate adultery.

We hate thievery.

We hate lying.

We hate coveting.

That sums up love of neighbor.

All roads of the Law lead to love of God and neighbor.

As Jesus said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22.37-40).

And all of life (Deut. 32.46, 47) – walking God's pathway with a proper focus on love and hate.

For reflection

1. Why do we need to have both love and hate operating in our hearts?
2. How do we know what to love and what to hate?
3. What should we do when we find either of these affections out of focus or not working as they should?

If any person boasts that he loves the Divine Law, and yet neglects the study of it, and applies his mind to other things, he betrays the grossest hypocrisy; for the love of the law, and especially such an ardent love of it as the prophet here expresses, always produces continual meditation upon it. John Calvin (1559-1564), Commentary on Psalm 119.97

Pray Psalm 119.97-104.

Ask the Lord to work in your heart to help you love Him and His Word and to hate everything that opposes Him. Pray specifically about the day ahead with these two affections in focus.

Sing Psalm 119.99-102.

(Truro: [*Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns*](#))

Your Word is with me ever more; it fills my soul and guides my hand.

More than all those who've gone before Your holy Law I understand.

Psalm 119.97-104

I guard my steps from evil ways that I may keep Your holy Word.
I keep Your judgments for Your praise, for You my Teacher are, O Lord!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How would you counsel a new believer to delight in and love the Word of God?
2. Why do we say the Word of God is both “sweet and sour”? Why do we need both of these?
3. Should we always expect to increase in God’s Word and salvation? Explain. How can we do that?
4. How broad is the Word of God? What does this mean for our daily life?
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.