

The Greatness & Glory of God's Word: Psalm 119 Introduction
ABC 3/18/18

Open your Bibles to Ps 119. **(S)** Psalms is the longest book in the Bible & Ps 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It's also the longest poem, longest prayer, & longest acrostic in the Bible. It's longer than many other books in the Bible. It's theme, or at least one theme, is the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. What does that mean? That God's Word is authoritative, reliable, & powerful. It reveals what the Scriptures do for us & what we must do with Scripture. Whole forests have been harvested to supply paper to all the books & sermons written on this psalm. In Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*, he spends 398 pages on Ps 119. Spurgeon liked this psalm so much he said, *We might do well to commit it to memory.*¹ Many have done this, I'm not one of them. The Puritan Thomas Manton wrote a 3 volume set on this Psalm. Each volume is between 500-600 pages, with a total of 1,677! There are 190 chapters, more than one chapter for each verse. We won't spend quite that much time with it, but, not counting today & next week, we'll spend 22 weeks in this psalm. As Spurgeon points out, with a superficial reading, **(S)** *readers have imagined that it harps upon one string & abound in pious repetitions & redundancies; but this arises from the shallowness of the reader's own mind: those who have studied this divine hymn, & carefully noted each line of it, are amazed at the variety & profundity of the thought.*² I want to spend enough time in this so we see *the variety & profundity of* this psalm.

Before we get into it, who is the author of this Psalm? No one knows but many have taken guesses, including David (some say he wrote it to teach Solomon the alphabet). Others think it was Ezra, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Esther, Daniel, or one of his 3 friends, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, & Abed-nego). Apparently it doesn't matter who wrote it, because God hasn't told us. It does appear to have been written over a period of time & later compiled because there's not a definite flow of thought from the beginning to the end. The sections & vss aren't like a chain where one link is connected to the other, but like a string of pearls where each pearl has equal, but independent, value. As Spurgeon put it, it's... **(S)**

¹ *Treasury of David*, Introduction, www.romans45.org/spurgeon/treasury/ps119/intro.htm

² *The Golden Alphabet*, preface

charmingly varied from beginning to end. Its variety is that of a kaleidoscope: from a few objects innumerable permutations & combinations are produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, & there is a strangely beautiful form: you shift the glass a very little, & another shape, equally delicate & beautiful, is before your eyes. (S) So it is here. What you see is the same, & yet never the same. It is the same truth, but it is always placed in a new light, put in a new connection, or in some way or other invested with freshness.³

This morning we're going to do something a little different in that we're going to read Ps 119, all 176 vss. Chances are you haven't heard it read out loud in its entirety. But before we do that, let me remind you this is a Hebrew poem & whatever translation you're using probably breaks this psalm down into 22 eight verse sections. Why? Because the Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters & each of the 8 vss in each section begins with a particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If you look down at vs 1 you probably have the Hebrew letter, **(S)** given or spelled out, *ALEPH*. Every vs in this section begins with this letter. **(S)** Vs 9 has *BETH* over it & so on all the way through the Hebrew alphabet. We don't see this in our English translations because there's almost no way to duplicate it in English. Although Ronald Knox has tried in his Catholic translation of the Bible. It goes like this: **(S)**

1 Ah, blessed they, who pass through life's journey unstained, who follow the law of the Lord!
2 Ah, blessed they, who cherish His decrees, make Him the whole quest of their hearts!
3 Afar from wrong-doing, Thy sure paths they tread.
4 Above all else it binds us, the charge Thou hast given us to keep. (S)
5 Ah, how shall my steps be surely guided to keep faith with thy covenant?
6 Attentive to all Thy commandments, I go my way undismayed.
7 A true heart's worship Thou shalt have, Thy just awards prompting me.
8 All shall be done Thy laws demand, so Thou wilt not forsake me utterly. (S)

9 Best shall he keep his youth unstained, who is true to Thy trust.
10 Be Thou the whole quest of my heart; never let me turn aside from Thy commandments.
11 Buried deep in my heart, Thy warnings shall keep me clear of sin.
12 Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me to know Thy will. (S)
13 By these lips let the awards Thou makest ever be recorded.
14 Blithely as one that has found great possessions, I follow Thy decrees.
15 Be thinking me still of the charge Thou givest, I will mark Thy footsteps.
16 Be Thy covenant ever my delight, Thy words kept in memory.

That's kind of awkward but it gives you the idea. Also keep in mind the different words used for the Word of God throughout this Psalm. Briefly, for now, **(S)** the 1st & most significant of them is the word **law** which is the Hebrew word, *torah*. It refers to God's instruction. He gives these to us so we know what He requires for a godly life. **(S)** Then be on the lookout for the word **testimony**.

³ *Golden Alphabet*, p 3

This refers to what God solemnly testifies to be His will for our life. **(S)** Then there's the word **precepts** which refers to what God has appointed for us to do. **(S)** Next is the word **statues**. This refers to what our divine Law-giver has laid down as His will for us. **(S)** Then there's the word **commandments**. This, of course, refers to the things God has commanded us to do. **(S)** Next is the word **ordinances** or **judgments** because these rules are more like rulings. They're what the divine Judge has ruled to be right. A judge in a courtroom gives a ruling or renders a judgment & that's what these ordinances or **judgments** are. **(S)** **Way** is the next word to be looking for. It refers to a course of life or a mode of action. **(S)** & then finally, there are 2 Hebrew words for **word** that are used. The more general word means God has spoken & revealed Himself. The other refers to a promise that God has given. One of those terms occurs in almost every vs of this psalm. The whole psalm celebrates the Word of God. Before we read & hear it, let's look to God in prayer. **(S)**

This is the Word of God to us. Hear Psalm 119:

*How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the **law** of the LORD.
How blessed are those who observe His **testimonies**,
Who seek Him with all their heart.
They also do no unrighteousness;
They walk in His **ways**.
You have ordained Your **precepts**,
That we should keep them diligently.
Oh that my ways may be established
To keep Your **statutes**!
Then I shall not be ashamed
When I look upon all Your **commandments**.
I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous **judgments**.
I shall keep Your **statutes**;
Do not forsake me utterly!*

*How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping it according to Your **word**.
With all my heart I have sought You;
Do not let me wander from Your **commandments**.
Your **word** I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.
Blessed are You, O LORD;
Teach me Your **statutes**.
With my lips I have told of
All the **ordinances** of Your mouth.
I have rejoiced in the way of Your **testimonies**,*

As much as in all riches,
 I will meditate on Your **precepts**
 & regard Your **ways**.
 I shall delight in Your **statutes**;
 I shall not forget Your **word**.

Deal bountifully with Your servant,
 That I may live & keep Your **word**.
 Open my eyes, that I may behold
 Wonderful things from Your **law**.
 I am a stranger in the earth;
 Do not hide Your **commandments** from me.
 My soul is crushed with longing
 After Your **ordinances** at all times.
 You rebuke the arrogant, the cursed,
 Who wander from Your **commandments**.
 Take away reproach & contempt from me,
 For I observe Your **testimonies**.
 Even though princes sit & talk against me,
 Your servant meditates on Your **statutes**.
 Your **testimonies** also are my delight;
 They are my **counselors**.

My soul cleaves to the dust;
 Revive me according to Your **word**.
 I have told of my **ways**, & You have answered me;
 Teach me Your **statutes**.
 Make me understand the **way** of Your **precepts**,
 So I will meditate on Your **wonders**.
 My soul weeps because of grief;
 Strengthen me according to Your **word**.
 Remove the false way from me,
 & graciously grant me Your **law**.
 I have chosen the faithful **way**;
 I have placed Your **ordinances** before me.
 I cling to Your **testimonies**;
 O LORD, do not put me to shame!
 I shall run the way of Your **commandments**,
 For You will enlarge my heart.

Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your **statutes**,
 & I shall observe it to the end.
 Give me understanding, that I may observe Your **law**
 & keep it with all my heart.
 Make me walk in the path of Your **commandments**,
 For I delight in it.
 Incline my heart to Your **testimonies**
 & not to dishonest gain.
 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity,
 & revive me in Your **ways**.
 Establish Your **word** to Your servant,
 As that which produces reverence for You.
 Turn away my reproach which I dread,
 For Your **ordinances** are good.

Behold, I long for Your **precepts**;
Revive me through Your righteousness.

May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD,
Your salvation according to Your **word**;
So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me,
For I trust in Your **word**.
& do not take the **word** of truth utterly out of my mouth,
For I wait for Your **ordinances**.
So I will keep Your **law** continually,
Forever & ever.
& I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your **precepts**.
I will also speak of Your **testimonies** before kings
& shall not be ashamed.
I shall delight in Your **commandments**,
Which I love.
& I shall lift up my hands to Your **commandments**,
Which I love;
& I will meditate on Your **statutes**.

Remember the **word** to Your servant,
In which You have made me hope.
This is my comfort in my affliction,
That Your **word** has revived me.
The arrogant utterly deride me,
Yet I do not turn aside from Your **law**.
I have remembered Your **ordinances** from of old, O LORD,
& comfort myself.
Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked,
Who forsake Your **law**.
Your **statutes** are my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage.
O LORD, I remember Your name in the night,
& keep Your **law**.
This has become mine,
That I observe Your **precepts**.

The LORD is my portion;
I have promised to keep Your **words**.
I sought Your favor with all my heart;
Be gracious to me according to Your **word**.
I considered my **ways**
& turned my feet to Your **testimonies**.
I hastened & did not delay
To keep Your **commandments**.
The cords of the wicked have encircled me,
But I have not forgotten Your **law**.
At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to You
Because of Your righteous **ordinances**.
I am a companion of all those who fear You,
& of those who keep Your **precepts**.
The earth is full of Your lovingkindness, O LORD;
Teach me Your **statutes**.

You have dealt well with Your servant,
 O LORD, according to Your **word**.
 Teach me good discernment & knowledge,
 For I believe in Your **commandments**.
 Before I was afflicted I went astray,
 But now I keep Your **word**.
 You are good & do good;
 Teach me Your **statutes**.
 The arrogant have forged a lie against me;
 With all my heart I will observe Your **precepts**.
 Their heart is covered with fat,
 But I delight in Your **law**.
 It is good for me that I was afflicted,
 That I may learn Your **statutes**.
 The **law** of Your mouth is better to me
 Than thousands of gold & silver pieces.

Your hands made me & fashioned me;
 Give me understanding, that I may learn Your **commandments**.
 May those who fear You see me & be glad,
 Because I wait for Your **word**.
 I know, O LORD, that Your **judgments** are righteous,
 & that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
 O may Your lovingkindness comfort me,
 According to Your **word** to Your servant.
 May Your compassion come to me that I may live,
 For Your **law** is my delight.
 May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie;
 But I shall meditate on Your **precepts**.
 May those who fear You turn to me,
 Even those who know Your **testimonies**.
 May my heart be blameless in Your **statutes**,
 So that I will not be ashamed.

My soul languishes for Your salvation;
 I wait for Your **word**.
 My eyes fail with longing for Your **word**,
 While I say, "When will You comfort me?"
 Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
 I do not forget Your **statutes**.
 How many are the days of Your servant?
 When will You execute **judgment** on those who persecute me?
 The arrogant have dug pits for me,
 Men who are not in accord with Your **law**.
 All Your **commandments** are faithful;
 They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!
 They almost destroyed me on earth,
 But as for me, I did not forsake Your **precepts**.
 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,
 So that I may keep the **testimony** of Your mouth.

Forever, O LORD,
 Your **word** is settled in heaven.

Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations;
 You established the earth, & it stands.
 They stand this day according to Your **ordinances**,
 For all things are Your servants.
 If Your **law** had not been my delight,
 Then I would have perished in my affliction.
 I will never forget Your **precepts**,
 For by them You have revived me.
 I am Yours, save me;
 For I have sought Your **precepts**.
 The wicked wait for me to destroy me;
 I shall diligently consider Your **testimonies**.
 I have seen a limit to all perfection;
 Your **commandment** is exceedingly broad.

O how I love Your **law**!
 It is my meditation all the day.
 Your **commandments** make me wiser than my enemies,
 For they are ever mine.
 I have more insight than all my teachers,
 For Your **testimonies** are my meditation.
 I understand more than the aged,
 Because I have observed Your **precepts**.
 I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
 That I may keep Your **word**.
 I have not turned aside from Your **ordinances**,
 For You Yourself have taught me.
 How sweet are Your **words** to my taste!
 Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
 From Your **precepts** I get understanding;
 Therefore I hate every false way.

Your **word** is a lamp to my feet
 & a light to my path.
 I have sworn & I will confirm it,
 That I will keep Your righteous **ordinances**.
 I am exceedingly afflicted;
 Revive me, O LORD, according to Your **word**.
 O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,
 & teach me Your **ordinances**.
 My life is continually in my hand,
 Yet I do not forget Your **law**.
 The wicked have laid a snare for me,
 Yet I have not gone astray from Your **precepts**.
 I have inherited Your **testimonies** forever,
 For they are the joy of my heart.
 I have inclined my heart to perform Your **statutes**
 Forever, even to the end.

I hate those who are double-minded,
 But I love Your **law**.
 You are my hiding place & my shield;
 I wait for Your **word**.
 Depart from me, evildoers,

That I may observe the **commandments** of my God.
 Sustain me according to Your **word**, that I may live;
 & do not let me be ashamed of my hope.
 Uphold me that I may be safe,
 That I may have regard for Your **statutes** continually.
 You have rejected all those who wander from Your **statutes**,
 For their deceitfulness is useless.
 You have removed all the wicked of the earth like dross;
 Therefore I love Your **testimonies**.
 My flesh trembles for fear of You,
 & I am afraid of Your **judgments**.

I have done justice & righteousness;
 Do not leave me to my oppressors.
 Be surety for Your servant for good;
 Do not let the arrogant oppress me.
 My eyes fail with longing for Your salvation
 & for Your righteous **word**.
 Deal with Your servant according to Your lovingkindness
 & teach me Your **statutes**.
 I am Your servant; give me understanding,
 That I may know Your **testimonies**.
 It is time for the LORD to act,
 For they have broken Your **law**.
 Therefore I love Your **commandments**
 Above gold, yes, above fine gold.
 Therefore I esteem right all Your **precepts** concerning everything,
 I hate every false way.

Your **testimonies** are wonderful;
 Therefore my soul observes them.
 The unfolding of Your **words** gives light;
 It gives understanding to the simple.
 I opened my mouth wide & panted,
 For I longed for Your **commandments**.
 Turn to me & be gracious to me,
 After Your manner with those who love Your name.
 Establish my footsteps in Your **word**,
 & do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.
 Redeem me from the oppression of man,
 That I may keep Your **precepts**.
 Make Your face shine upon Your servant,
 & teach me Your **statutes**.
 My eyes shed streams of water,
 Because they do not keep Your **law**.

Righteous are You, O LORD,
 & upright are Your **judgments**.
 You have commanded Your **testimonies** in righteousness
 & exceeding faithfulness.
 My zeal has consumed me,
 Because my adversaries have forgotten Your **words**.
 Your **word** is very pure,
 Therefore Your servant loves it.

*I am small & despised,
 Yet I do not forget Your **precepts**.
 Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
 & Your **law** is truth.
 Trouble & anguish have come upon me,
 Yet Your **commandments** are my delight.
 Your **testimonies** are righteous forever;
 Give me understanding that I may live.*

*I cried with all my heart; answer me, O LORD!
 I will observe Your **statutes**.
 I cried to You; save me
 & I shall keep Your **testimonies**.
 I rise before dawn & cry for help;
 I wait for Your **words**.
 My eyes anticipate the night watches,
 That I may meditate on Your **word**.
 Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness;
 Revive me, O LORD, according to Your **ordinances**.
 Those who follow after wickedness draw near;
 They are far from Your **law**.
 You are near, O LORD,
 & all Your **commandments** are truth.
 Of old I have known from Your **testimonies**
 That You have founded them forever.*

*Look upon my affliction & rescue me,
 For I do not forget Your **law**.
 Plead my cause & redeem me;
 Revive me according to Your **word**.
 Salvation is far from the wicked,
 For they do not seek Your **statutes**.
 Great are Your mercies, O LORD;
 Revive me according to Your **ordinances**.
 Many are my persecutors & my adversaries,
 Yet I do not turn aside from Your **testimonies**.
 I behold the treacherous & loathe them,
 Because they do not keep Your **word**.
 Consider how I love Your **precepts**;
 Revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness.
 The sum of Your **word** is truth,
 & every one of Your righteous **ordinances** is everlasting.*

*Princes persecute me without cause,
 But my heart stands in awe of Your **words**.
 I rejoice at Your **word**,
 As one who finds great spoil.
 I hate & despise falsehood,
 But I love Your **law**.
 Seven times a day I praise You,
 Because of Your righteous **ordinances**.
 Those who love Your **law** have great peace,
 & nothing causes them to stumble.
 I hope for Your salvation, O LORD,*

& do Your **commandments**.
 My soul keeps Your **testimonies**,
 & I love them exceedingly.
 I keep Your **precepts** & Your **testimonies**,
 For all my **ways** are before You.

Let my cry come before You, O LORD;
 Give me understanding according to Your **word**.
 Let my supplication come before You;
 Deliver me according to Your **word**.
 Let my lips utter praise,
 For You teach me Your **statutes**.
 Let my tongue sing of Your **word**,
 For all Your **commandments** are righteousness.
 Let Your hand be ready to help me,
 For I have chosen Your **precepts**.
 I long for Your salvation, O LORD,
 & Your **law** is my delight.
 Let my soul live that it may praise You,
 & let Your **ordinances** help me.
 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant,
 For I do not forget Your **commandments**.

Amen, & thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, & inerrant Word found in Ps 119. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts today. That was fun! We'll have to do that again, but next time I'll get 22 of you to read! (S)

Turn back to vs 1 & keep a finger there. Then turn to vs 176. **1, 176**

The psalmist isn't saying the way we're made right with God is by keeping these rules & therefore being accepted. He isn't saying, *How I love Your law, O Lord, as a covenant of works where we're made to be in a right standing with You by our deeds*. He's saying, *I love Your commands, O Lord, as the rule of life, not as a system of works to earn righteousness*. The psalmist is well aware & utterly realistic about the way he & we stumble daily, no matter how much we love the Lord. & so in vs 1 he says, **Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!** But in vs 176 he says, **I have gone astray like a lost sheep**. & then he lifts up this prayer, **Seek Your servant**. & thus, in this psalm, he reminds us we need a Savior who comes to seek & to save the lost. & that's precisely what our Savior, Jesus, tells us He came to do (Lk 19:10). In fact, He even tells the story of a flock of sheep, one of whom has wandered off & the Good Shepherd goes after that sheep to reclaim it (Lk 15:3-7). The glorying in the law of the psalmist isn't contrary to grace, but flawlessly & perfectly consistent with it. There's a love of the

law as a rule of life & there's a recognition that we need a seeking, saving, & gracious Savior. Again, all Scripture is about Jesus. Here we again see that God is holy, we are sinners, & we need a Savior to seek us out. & by way of reminder of last week's sermon & so we're all on the same page, from Ps 119 we see that God's Word is authoritative, reliable, & powerful. **(S)**

Authoritative When God speaks, He doesn't mumble or misspeak. The Bible isn't a book of *helpful hints for happy living*. It speaks with authority. The terms used as synonyms for the Bible in this psalm convey the concept of authority. & we'll look closer at them next time. God's Word is also... **(S)**

Reliable We can trust God's Word. All of it is faithful, righteous, & true (86, 138, 140, 151, 160). It doesn't change with the times (89, 152). One of the amazing things about the Bible is it speaks with practical relevance to every culture in every time. When we read John Calvin's expositions of Scripture, written 500 years ago to people in a very different world than our own, he still speaks with relevance to us! The answers to all the problems we face today are in the Bible, because it speaks God's truth to our human condition, which hasn't changed over the centuries. Satan is always trying to undermine the credibility of God's Word. He did so with Adam & Eve & he does so with us. If he can't do it by attacking the inerrancy of Scripture, he does it by subtly eroding belief in the sufficiency of Scripture. John MacArthur writes, **(S)**

*Contemporary evangelicalism has been beguiled & sabotaged by a ruinous lack of confidence in God's Word. I'm not talking about the question of whether God gave us an inerrant Bible. Of course He did. & the great majority of evangelicals accept that without question. But many who would never doubt the Bible's authenticity as God's Word or distrust its essential authority as a guide for righteous living **(S)** have nevertheless accepted the notion that Scripture simply does not contain all we need to minister well in these complex & sophisticated modern times. So they turn to human expertise in the fields of psychology, business, government, politics, entertainment, or whatever else they think might supply some recipe for success that's lacking in Scripture.⁴*

We need to come back to what the psalmist here repeatedly affirms, that Scripture is reliable because it comes to us from God who understands our needs & who graciously has revealed how we should live. **(S)** The Bible is God's authoritative & reliable Word. We must trust, read, & know it! It is also... **(S)**

⁴ *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, p 117

Powerful Down through the centuries the Bible has had life-transforming effects in the lives of countless people from every walk of life, hopefully including yours. As the author of Hebrews writes, **For the word of God is living & active & sharper than any two-edged sword, & piercing as far as the division of soul & spirit, of both joints & marrow, & able to judge the thoughts & intentions of the heart** (4:12). God's Word, including Psalm 119, is authoritative, reliable, & powerful.

Next week we'll look at the themes of this psalm & work at applying it to our hearts. I encourage you to read, re-read, think about, meditate on, & study Ps 119 this week & ask yourself, **(S)** *Am I a person of the Word? Is it my passion? Do I trust it? Do I read it? Do I believe it? Do I obey it? Does it guide me in every area of life?* Ask God to powerfully revive us all through His Word. Let's pray.