

May 15, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: The Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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LIVING OUT GOD'S WORD Psalm 119

Most English translations of the Bible show the twenty-two divisions of this psalm based on the Hebrew alphabet. Each section of verses contains eight verses with each verse beginning with a word whose first letter is the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. For example, in the first section there are eight verses and each verse begins with a word starting with the letter *Aleph*. In the second section, verses 9-16, each verse begins with a word whose first letter is *Beth*, and so on throughout the psalm. The entire Hebrew alphabet is represented except near the end. Some Bible students lump the Hebrews letters *Seen* and *Sheen* together in verses 161-168. And it is true that some of the verses in this section begin with the letter *Seen* and some begin with the letter *Sheen*.

Okay, that is a brief look at the technical layout of the psalm. However, the richness of the psalm is found in the various themes that run concurrently throughout the entire psalm. Obviously, the over-arching theme is the supremacy, the faithfulness, the vitality of God's word. The writer expressed delight, regard, gladness, treasuring, love, and dependance toward God's word. These feelings are repeated throughout the psalm to the point that some scholars have expressed concern that the writer was worshiping the Scripture instead of the Author of the Scripture. However, since the Scripture is the self-revelation of the Author, it has to be true that we worship God when we love His word.

It is also instructive for us to notice the various words the author used repeatedly to describe our Bible. He calls it the *law* of God, the *Torah*. As we know, this word means teaching and refers to the purpose of the Bible as our teacher.

He calls it the *testimonies* of the Lord. A testimony is a witness. The Bible witnesses to God's character, as well as to the traits of sinners and to our own need for salvation.

The writer called the Scripture God's *precepts*. Precepts are the rules of overseers, the rules they apply as they look at the details of things or people under their care. Because all creation is under God's care, we do well to know and practice His precepts.

He calls the Bible God's *statutes*. Statutes speak of the binding force of God's word. His word is like words etched in stone that will never pass away. His word is forever settled in heaven.

The Bible is a collection of God's *commandments*. Commands convey the authority of the one who gives them. When God gives commands, He reveals that He has the authority to declare the command, the authority to enforce the command, and the authority to expect us to obey His commands.

He said that these are God's *ordinances*. Ordinances are rules or judgments. They are the supreme example of the Judge handing down decisions that map out how the people under His jurisdiction should conduct themselves. On a much lower level, we Americans constantly have our lives refocused by the "ordinances" the "judgments" that the justices on the Supreme Court hand down. We obey God's ordinances first.

The Bible is God's *word* according to the writer. This is the simplest expression of God's communication. What God speaks reveals to us what God is like and the relationship He desires between Himself and His created beings.

Finally, the author referred to the Bible as God's *promise* or promises. This Hebrew word is very similar to the one we considered previously and, therefore, some English translations simply translate it as *word*. However, you will notice that the ESV has translated this word as "Promise" in thirteen verses. To find God's promises throughout this Bible is very encouraging for God's people.

As mentioned previously, we discover certain themes running concurrently throughout the psalm. For example, there is the theme of God's righteousness, the faithfulness and truth of His word, and the certainty of God's promises all found throughout this song. From the human perspective, the author repeated the themes of our needy

condition, our desires toward God and His word, and the perennial problem of adversaries.

For our study at this point, we will simply read through this psalm in one setting (which is rarely done). Along the way, I will attempt to point out an overriding theme found in each section. That will make for twenty-two themes. All of these themes are an expression of reality or desire from the viewpoint of the reader who loves God, trusts God, and trusts the promises God has made in His word. Our goal is to find great encouragement as we identify with the writer's thoughts and desires.

The first section is called *Aleph*. Here we discover our goal regarding God's word.

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! (2) Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, (3) who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! (4) You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. (5) Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! (6) Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. (7) I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. (8) I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

According to these verses, we know that God expects for His people to be diligent to keep His commands (v.4). Therefore, our goal is to walk in His law, to keep His testimonies, keep His precepts, learn His rules and keep our eyes on His commands (vv.1-6). The result of keeping God's word is genuine happiness, the idea behind the word "blessed" which is found in the first two verses.

The second section is *Beth*. In these verses we find our plan for achieving the previously stated goal of walking in the truth of God's word.

(9) How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. (10) With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! (11) I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. (12) Blessed are

you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! (13) With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. (14) In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. (15) I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. (16) I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

The opening question in this section wonders how a young man (or woman for that matter) stays pure (v.1). The answer is by guarding our way according to God's word (v.9). We stay on the goal for walking according to God's word by keeping our hearts focused on God through His word so that we don't wander (v.10) and by storing up God's word to minimize sinning (v.11).

The third section is *Gimel*. This section reveals our desire toward God's word.

(17) Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. (18) Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (19) I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! (20) My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times. (21) You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments. (22) Take away from me scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies. (23) Even though princes sit plotting against me, your servant will meditate on your statutes. (24) Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.

Our desire is for God to pour out great blessings on us (v.17). Great blessing is not necessarily money or possessions or a good time in life. Great blessing is God opening my eyes to His truth, revealing His commands to me (vv.17-19). When that happens, I am delighted in His testimonies (v.24).

Four is *Daleth*. This section reveals the truth about my condition, which helps me understand why I need God's word.

(25) My soul clings to the dust; give me life according to your word! (26) When I told of my ways, you answered me; teach me your statutes! (27) Make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. (28) My soul melts away for sorrow;

strengthen me according to your word! (29) Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law! (30) I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your rules before me. (31) I cling to your testimonies, O LORD; let me not be put to shame! (32) I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

By reading the Bible, we become completely humiliated because we come to know our sinful condition (vv.25,28). Our deplorable spiritual condition becomes obvious because God's word makes it plain (vv.26,27,29).

Fifth is the section named *He*. In "He" we find the psalmist's request for teaching from God's word.

(33) Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. (34) Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. (35) Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. (36) Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! (37) Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. (38) Confirm to your servant your promise, that you may be feared. (39) Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. (40) Behold, I long for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life!

The Hebrew word translated teach is *yarah* (v.33). Recently we learned from our study that the word means to shoot an arrow, throw a stone, or teach. All of those actions have the same purpose—to hit a predetermined target. To that end, we request God to give us understanding (the ability to discern or sort out) (v.34). We ask God to lead us, guide us along the path (v.35). We request Him to incline our heart to Him, which means we will stretch out to grasp understanding (v.36). We ask Him to turn our eyes, to cause us to look away from evil (v.37). We request that God will confirm His promises, to raise them up or build them in our hearts (v.38).

Sixth is *Vav*. The theme of this section speaks of our confidence in God's word.

(41) Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; (42) then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your

word. (43) And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your rules. (44) I will keep your law continually, forever and ever, (45) and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts. (46) I will also speak of your testimonies before kings and shall not be put to shame, (47) for I find my delight in your commandments, which I love. (48) I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes.

Here we have confidence because we know God's love is unchanging (v.41). We know God has the answers (v.42). Therefore, our hope is standing on God's rules (v.43). And because these things are true, we can even tell God's truth to kings and not be ashamed (v.46).

Seventh is the section named *Zayin*. These verses point to our recollection of God and His word.

(49) Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. (50) This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. (51) The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. (52) When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O LORD. (53) Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law. (54) Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my sojourning. (55) I remember your name in the night, O LORD, and keep your law. (56) This blessing has fallen to me, that I have kept your precepts.

Knowing that God remembers gives us hope in times of affliction (vv.49-50). Though we are being badgered by the insolent, we are able to remember God's rules and that gives us comfort (vv.51-52). Indeed, to be able to remember God's name in the night is a blessing (vv.55-56).

Eight is *Heth*. Here we find reference to our inheritance to which we love to resort.

(57) The LORD is my portion; I promise to keep your words. (58) I entreat your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. (59) When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; (60) I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.

(61) Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law. (62) At midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous rules. (63) I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts. (64) The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes!

God's word teaches us that He, the Lord, is our reward or inheritance (v.57). This promised reward is learned in the Scripture to which we run when we think about our ways (v.59), when we are tested by sin (v.61), and even at midnight when we can't sleep (v.62).

Ninth is the section named *Teth*. This is our assessment of God's work in our life.

(65) You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word. (66) Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. (67) Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. (68) You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. (69) The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; (70) their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. (71) It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. (72) The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

The Bible reminds us that God has dealt well with us (v.65). He has dealt well because God's judgment and knowledge are good (v.66). God's judgment has to be good because God is good by nature and, therefore, always does good (v.68). Then why does the psalmist mention affliction and trouble so many times in this psalm? God allows affliction that is good to drive me to His word (v.71). Therefore, God's law really is better to us than riches (v.72).

The tenth section is *Yodh*. Here the theme is my request for God to make distinctions between me and the unsaved world.

(73) Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. (74) Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. (75) I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. (76) Let your

steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant. (77) Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. (78) Let the insolent be put to shame, because they have wronged me with falsehood; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts. (79) Let those who fear you turn to me, that they may know your testimonies. (80) May my heart be blameless in your statutes, that I may not be put to shame!

To create a distinction, we desire for God to let us be a cause for rejoicing among those who fear God (v.74). We pray that He will let us be comforted by His unchanging love (v.76). Our desire is to let God's mercy cause us to live for Him (v.77) while at the same time God's justice lets the insolent be put to shame (v.78). In contrast to those who are insolent, let those who fear the Lord turn to us for encouragement (v.79).

Eleventh is *Kaph*. Similar to the section named *Daleth*, this section speaks of our humility before God.

(81) My soul longs for your salvation; I hope in your word. (82) My eyes long for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?" (83) For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes. (84) How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me? (85) The insolent have dug pitfalls for me; they do not live according to your law. (86) All your commandments are sure; they persecute me with falsehood; help me! (87) They have almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts. (88) In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

This section reveals that I truly hope in God's word for comfort (vv.81-82). I need comfort because the trials of life make me feel like an empty wineskin that has been hung in a tent filled with smoke so that I am wrinkled and sooty (v.83). There are those days when we wonder how long we must endure the persecution of our enemies (vv.-84-87). But through all these circumstances that leave us humbled before God, we cleave to God's promises (v.88).

The twelfth section is named *Lamedh*. In this section we see that the author's confidence is in God's faithfulness.

(89) Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. (90) Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast. (91) By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants. (92) If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. (93) I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. (94) I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts. (95) The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies. (96) I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad.

God's word is established forever unchanging (v.89). More than that, God's faithfulness to His word endures forever (v.90). Therefore, though the wicked seek to destroy me, God's word is still my refuge because I know that it never changes (vv.92-96).

Thirteenth is *Mem*. The theme in this section is my love for God's word.

(97) Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. (98) Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. (99) I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. (100) I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. (101) I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. (102) I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me. (103) How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (104) Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

We should wholeheartedly agree with the direct affirmation that "I love the Bible" (v.97). I love the Bible because it gives wisdom and understanding (vv.98-100). To that end, it is accurate to say that the Bible is sweeter than honey to me (v.103). If that is really true in our lives, we will often be found feeding on it.

Fourteenth is *Nun*. This section reveals our dependence on God's word.

(105) Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (106) I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. (107) I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word! (108) Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your rules. (109) I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. (110) The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. (111) Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. (112) I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

I depend on the Bible is the very practical sense that the Bible sheds light on a very dark path (v.102). Because it serves such basic needs in spiritual life, the Bible is life to me (v.107). The Bible is strength when life seems very tenuous (vv.109-110). In times of trouble, the Bible is the joy of my heart (v.111). This sounds like flowery but meaningless words to people who do not depend on the Bible. But it is our life source.

Fifteenth is *Samekh*. Here the theme is my hatred for that which opposes God's word.

(113) I hate the double-minded, but I love your law. (114) You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in your word. (115) Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God. (116) Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me not be put to shame in my hope! (117) Hold me up, that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually! (118) You spurn all who go astray from your statutes, for their cunning is in vain. (119) All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross, therefore I love your testimonies. (120) My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.

The psalmist bluntly stated that he hates those who do not follow God's law (v.113). Do we agree with him that we wish the evildoers would leave us alone (v.115)? We might feel that way if we strongly respond like God who rejects those who turn away from His word (vv.118-119).

Sixteenth is the section named, *Ayin*. This sections points to our efforts to live according to God's word.

(121) I have done what is just and right; do not leave me to my oppressors. (122) Give your servant a pledge of good; let not the insolent oppress me. (123) My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise. (124) Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love, and teach me your statutes. (125) I am your servant; give me understanding, that I may know your testimonies! (126) It is time for the LORD to act, for your law has been broken. (127) Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. (128) Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.

We should be able to agree with the writer and claim that we have tried to do right (v.121). We look with hope to the fulfillment of God's promises (v.123). We continue to be God's servant (vv.124-125) because we love God's commands more than gold (v.127).

Seventeenth is the section named *Pe*. Here are my expectations of the work of God's word in my life.

(129) Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. (130) The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (131) I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments. (132) Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is your way with those who love your name. (133) Keep steady my steps according to your promise, and let no iniquity get dominion over me. (134) Redeem me from man's oppression, that I may keep your precepts. (135) Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes. (136) My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.

We expect God's word to give light and understanding (v.130). In fact, God graciously gives understanding of His commands to people who love Him (vv.131-132). Therefore, God's word keeps me and delivers me from human oppression (vv.133-134). This is the result because God's face shines on me through His word (v.135).

Eighteenth is *Tsadhe*. The theme is my knowledge of God's righteousness revealed in His word.

(137) Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules. (138) You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness. (139) My zeal consumes me, because my foes forget your words. (140) Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it. (141) I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts. (142) Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true. (143) Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight. (144) Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live.

God's rules reveal His righteousness (v.137). God's promises have been put to the test and proved righteous (v.140). God's righteousness will always be the standard of righteousness (v.142). Therefore, we can be sure that God's testimonies will always be righteous (v.143).

Nineteenth is *Qoph*. Here is our plea and practice because of God's word.

(145) With my whole heart I cry; answer me, O LORD! I will keep your statutes. (146) I call to you; save me, that I may observe your testimonies. (147) I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your words. (148) My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. (149) Hear my voice according to your steadfast love; O LORD, according to your justice give me life. (150) They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose; they are far from your law. (151) But you are near, O LORD, and all your commandments are true. (152) Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever.

According to these verses, I pray to God for help in keeping the truths of His word (vv.145-146). Of course, I need to do my part by getting up early to read the Bible (vv.147-148). People are good with getting up early to read the Bible if they have known for a long time that God wrote His Bible for our benefit (v.152).

In the twentieth position is *Resh*. Here we learn that we who resort to God's word will take on a distinction from the rest of the world.

(153) Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law. (154) Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise! (155) Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek your statutes. (156) Great is your mercy, O LORD; give me life according to your rules. (157) Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, but I do not swerve from your testimonies. (158) I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands. (159) Consider how I love your precepts! Give me life according to your steadfast love. (160) The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

We plead our cause to God based on the truth in the Bible (vv.153-154). The wicked do not desire the Bible (v.155). We try to keep God's word in contrast to the wicked who do not care (vv.156-158).

Twenty-first is **Sin** and **Shin**. This section reveals our determination to keep God's word.

(161) Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words. (162) I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. (163) I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law. (164) Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules. (165) Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble. (166) I hope for your salvation, O LORD, and I do your commandments. (167) My soul keeps your testimonies; I love them exceedingly. (168) I keep your precepts and testimonies, for all my ways are before you.

In spite of persecution, I stand in awe of the Bible (v.161). Seven times each day I think about the God of the Bible and praise Him (v.164). I keep hoping in God's salvation and, therefore, I keep His commands, His testimonies, His precepts (vv.166-168).

Twenty-second is *Tav*. It is fitting to end this psalm with the theme of our praise because of God's word.

(169) Let my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word! (170) Let my plea come before you; deliver me according to your word. (171) My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. (172) My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right. (173) Let your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts. (174) I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight. (175) Let my soul live and praise you, and let your rules help me. (176) I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

We who read, study, and have come to love God's word desire for God to hear our cry and prayer (vv.169-170). And our prayer is not always a cry for help in the time of need. Our prayer is often our mouth pouring out praise to God (v.171). Often that praise is in the form of songs (v.172). From the depths of our soul we praise God (v.174-175).

This psalm is astonishingly deep in theology and practical wisdom. It is better than any other passage of the Bible, it tells us why God's word is so vital to the believer and how it shapes the way we think and live.