

Psalm 119

A study

Introduction.

“Give me life according to your word!” Psalm 119:25

This is the first of many passionate requests found in Psalm 119, where the psalmist boldly appeals to the **Source** of Life to give **him** life!

“Give me life in your ways” v.37

“In your steadfast love give me life” v.88

“Give me life, O Lord, according to your word!” v.107

The author of Psalm 119 confidently believes and declares that life is found in and through the Lord's Holy Scriptures. Moses declared a similar thought in Deut. 32:46-47 “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life.”

What are your thoughts as you read these verses? Do you, also, believe that life is found through the Scriptures? Is the psalmist's cry for life your cry, as you go about your days? My hope and prayer is that our gracious and generous Heavenly Father will use this study to bring us all to a place of deeper conviction that the Word, the Word made flesh, is the source of “all we need for life and for godliness”.

II Peter 1:3

“The more one studies it (Psalm 119) the fresher it becomes. As those who drink the Nile water like it better every time they take a draught, so does this Psalm become the more full and fascinating the oftener you turn to it. It contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost to bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it.” Charles Spurgeon

The writer of Psalm 119 knows his God. He has confidence in the character of his God, even when he doesn't understand his present circumstances. The author has such an intimate relationship with his

God that he comfortably bares his soul, humbly asks tough questions and boldly appeals for strength, grace, help, favor, etc., and ultimately, life!

John Calvin described Psalm 119 this way: "What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasure, it were difficult to find words to describe...I have often been wont to call this book not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. "

Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem divided into 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is not only the longest of all the psalms, with 176 verses, it is the longest chapter of the Bible, even longer than many of the books of the Bible. Of those 176 verses, 171 of them contain reference to God's Word. Many of the saints throughout history have studied and written about this psalm. Charles Bridges, an evangelical of the 20th century, wrote a commentary comprised of 481 pages on this psalm. Thomas Manton, a prolific Puritan, wrote a three-volume work on Psalm 119, with each volume at least 500 pages!

Johannes Paulus Palanterius wrote these words in 1600. "This Psalm is called the Alphabet of Divine Love, the Paradise of all the Doctrines, the Storehouse of the Holy Spirit, the School of Truth, also the deep mystery of the Scriptures, where the whole moral discipline of all the virtues shines brightly. And as all moral instruction is delightful, therefore this Psalm, because excelling in this kind of instruction, should be called delightful, inasmuch as it surpasses the rest. The other Psalms, truly, as lesser stars shine somewhat; but this burns with the meridian heat of its full brightness and is wholly resplendent with moral loveliness."

Psalm 119 has no named author. After spending many weeks/months in this psalm, I tend to agree with Charles Spurgeon that "David's hand is in this thing". This is "David's pocket book", "David's spoil". However, since no name is given, and I am certainly

no Bible scholar, I will refer to the author as: author, writer, psalmist, psalter, worshipper, and God-follower.

The idea for this study began to sprout during our recent Psalms, “Songs Along the Way” study. As I studied and completed the homework for Lesson 11, (Psalm 119), I was struck by the richness, the depth, and the vast range of emotions and topics addressed in the psalm. I didn’t want to rush through it and miss the “mind-blowing beauty, sin-killing power, and breathtaking expanse of God’s Word,” contained in this psalm. Sam Storms.

In my preparations for this study, I have benefited greatly from the following authors:

John Piper, “When I Don’t Desire God”, “Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ”, “Pierced by the Word”

James Montgomery Boice, “Psalms Volume 3”

Robert J. Morgan, “100 Bible Verses everyone should know by heart”

Charles Spurgeon, “The Treasury of David”

Many of the questions throughout this study stem from the thoughts, convictions and declarations that David Powlison shares in his article “Suffering and Psalm 119”.

At the outset, I encourage you to read the psalm in its entirety before beginning the study. And whenever possible, please do take time periodically to re-read the verses from previous lessons. This is certainly not a requirement, but rather a suggestion for how to gain the most benefit from this life-giving psalm. There is no danger of the text growing old!

“If the Writer may be permitted to suggest the method, in which this Exposition may be best studied to advantage, he would beg to refer to the advice of the excellent Philip Henry to his children—that they should ‘take a verse of Psalm 119 every morning to meditate upon, and so go over the Psalm twice in a year:’ and ‘*that*’—said he—‘will bring you to be in love with all the rest of the Scripture.’ ”

Charles Bridges, preacher/teacher, 1794-1869, Expository of Psalm 119

I also recommend printing a copy of the psalm so that you can circle and underline words, phrases, and reoccurring themes, etc. Use colored pencils, highlighters, pencils and pens. Write in the margins. Interact with the text! As John Piper declares:

I know not how the light is shed,
Nor understand this lens.
I only know that there are eyes
In pencils and in pens.
“When I Don’t Desire God”

Although this psalm is about much more than spiritual practices, it's evident the psalmist lives his everyday life employing many of the spiritual disciplines in order to gain understanding of the holy and precious Word of the living God, pursue holiness, and engage with his faithful Lord. He exhorts us to do the same! The disciplines the psalmist uses are by no means the end goal but rather, some of the gracious means the Lord provides him with, for the purpose of learning, growing, and following Him into deeper fellowship and relationship. I encourage you to incorporate the disciplines, or practices, into your daily time with the Lord. Sing praise songs, choose verses or stanzas to memorize, pray through the stanzas we are studying, making your own supplications.

During each of the seven lessons, we will spend a portion of time looking at one specific practice: the definition, how it's used in this psalm, and ways we can grow in using this discipline, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to grow deeper in our relationship with God our Father and Jesus Christ, His Son.

“The spiritual disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God's people since biblical times.” Donald Whitney

Lesson 1: Store
Lesson 2: Supplicate
Lesson 3: Study
Lesson 4: Steep
Lesson 5: Submit
Lesson 6: Savor
Lesson 7: Sing

The title “Psalms”: comes from the Greek *psalmois*, meaning “songs to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument”. Psalm 119 is a song of many genres, verses and choruses. The song is filled with prayers of laments, questions, declarations of praise, requests and cries for help, and that's just the beginning!

“This sacred ode (Psalm 119) is a little Bible, the Scriptures condensed, a mass of Bibline, Holy Writ rewritten in holy emotions and actions. Blessed are they who can read and understand these saintly aphorisms; they shall find golden apples in this true Hesperides, and come to reckon that this Psalm, like the whole Scripture which it praises, is a pearl island, or, better still, a garden of sweet flowers.” Spurgeon

Through honest and sincere prayers of our own, and utter dependence upon the Spirit, may we grow as active and engaged students of God's living Word, lovers of God's holy, inerrant Word, and imitators of Jesus, God's Word made flesh. May we do this not out of duty, but rather out of adoration and devotion to our sovereign, righteous, and merciful God, who loves us with an everlasting, steadfast love and provided us with the “perfect sacrifice” for our sin. “Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!
2 Corinthians 9:18

With the Helper as your guide, open your Bible and let's enter this lush garden, full of abundant life! Look eagerly and expectantly for the sweet flowers. Inhale their fragrance. Gaze in awe at their beauty. Search for golden apples to pick, taste and savor.

May we find His words "sweet to our taste and sweeter than honey to our mouths". Psalm 119:103

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

*“May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say. “*

Kate B. Wilkinson, 1859-1928

“It (Psalm 119) contains no idle word; the grapes of this cluster are almost bursting full with the new wine of the kingdom. The more you look into this mirror of a gracious heart the more you will see in it. It is loaded with holy sense and is as weighty as it is bulky.”

Charles Spurgeon

“Few things have a greater effect on the way we see God and the world than to memorize extended portions of Scripture.”

John Piper

Lesson 1: Psalm 119:1-16

“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119:10

Store: Keep or accumulate (something) for future use.

DAY ONE

Read 119:1-16 slowly.

1. What are your initial thoughts/observations as we begin this journey of picking and eating the sweet “grapes of this holy, weighty” psalm?

In the first 9 verses of this psalm, we are introduced to several different terms used to describe God’s living and active Word. Take a minute to jot these down.

As we journey through Psalm 119, we will see these terms used again and again.

The chart below, presented in the ESV Study Bible, gives a specific definition for seven of the terms. If you prefer a simpler definition, all of these terms are “referring to the whole of God’s spoken and written revelation” James Montgomery Boice

Terms in Psalm 119 for God's Covenant Revelation		
English	Hebrew	Meaning
law	<i>torah</i>	instruction
testimonies	<i>'edot</i>	what God solemnly testifies to be his will
precepts	<i>piqqudim</i>	what God has appointed to be done
statutes	<i>khuqqim; khuqqot</i>	what the divine Lawgiver has laid down
commandments	<i>mitswot</i>	what God has commanded
rules	<i>mishpatim</i>	what the divine Judge has ruled to be right
word	<i>'imrah; dabar</i>	what God has spoken

2. Read through verses 1-16 again, paying attention to the psalmist's attitudes and actions towards God's Word. His attitudes aren't always specifically spelled out for us, but what attitudes do you pick up on as you read his requests? What specific actions does he take or intend to take? Record your findings.

Attitudes

Actions

3. Take the opportunity, at the beginning of this study, to reflect on the following questions:

- Which of these attitudes do you desire to have towards God's Word?
- Which of the psalmist's actions would you most like to imitate?
- In what specific ways would you like to grow in loving, following and delighting in His Word? For example, maybe you desire that your days and lips be more regularly full of praises to your God? v.7 or, from v.15, maybe you'd like to spend more intentional time meditating on God's Holy Word? Etc.

4. Compose a personal prayer to the LORD, using exact words/verses from this section of Psalm 119, sharing with Him your desires and requests.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11

Prayer:

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore!
From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be
praised!”*

Psalm 113:2-3

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Luke 13:35

Day Two

Read Psalm 119:1-3

These verses serve as an introduction to the psalm.

1. What are the defining characteristics/actions of the blessed?

The Holy Scriptures tell us there is only ONE whose way is blameless, who never did any wrong, who sought the Lord with His whole heart. How is this One described in the following passages?

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 5:7-10

Although the specific name of Jesus is not mentioned in the book of psalms, the psalms are FULL of His story and presence! Luke 24:44 “Then he (Jesus) said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled”. “Jesus’ language (here) makes it absolutely certain that he believed the Psalms anticipated his future ministry of suffering and glory”. Tremper Longman III

At the very start of Psalm 119 we see a beautiful picture of Jesus, the ONLY ONE whose way is blameless, who walked perfectly in the ways of the Lord. Throughout this psalm, let's be on the lookout for Jesus, “the one who has himself suffered when tempted”, “yet was without sin”. Hebrews 2:18, 4:15

Now read 119:4-16.

2. What is the first desire the psalmist expresses? v.5

What hope does the psalmist (as well as we as believers), have of steadfastly keeping all the statutes of our God? Has there ever been even one day when we have walked blamelessly?

First, the bad news:

3. Read Romans 3:9-12 and put into your own words:

In our own strength, we have no hope of “doing no wrong” or seeking God with our whole hearts.

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...” Titus 3:4-5

4. The following passages declare the amazing truth, hope and good news for those who place their faith in Jesus! Read these passages and jot down the key points from each:

Romans 3:21-26

Romans 5:6-11, 18-21

Titus 2:11-14

God, because of His great love for us, through the sacrificial death of His beloved Son, has provided a way for us to be one of his blameless, declared righteous, dearly beloved children! Jesus, knowing we will never “do no wrong” while living on this earth, obeyed **for** us, in **our** place.

Once we confess our sin, repent, and surrender our lives to His Kingship, we are one of the blameless ones! Our merciful Father sees the sacrifice and perfection of His Son, Jesus, when He looks at us.

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness...” Isaiah 61:10

“God takes a heart in which righteousness does not exist, speaks the Word of life, and where once there was nothing, there is something; the righteousness of Christ. Where there was no righteousness, now there is his righteousness.”

Jen Wilkins

5. Take a few minutes to reflect on these amazing truths and offer a prayer of praise to the Lord for His incredible kindness to you, thru Jesus!

“Scripture has power that is supernatural, soothing, convicting, transforming, life-changing, timely, timeless, and eternal. Nothing beats having the Word of God stored away in the chambers of the mind.”

Robert Morgan

“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119: 11

“When we memorize a word, phrase, line, or verse from God’s Word, it’s like implanting a powerful radioactive speck of the very mind of God into our own finite brains. As we learn it “by heart,” it descends into the hidden crevices and fissures of our souls. As we meditate on it, it begins sending out its quiet, therapeutic waves of influence.”

Robert Morgan

Day 3

In the introduction, we discussed several different means or disciplines available to us to ingest the Word of God. For lesson 1, we will focus on.

Store: keep or accumulate (something) for future use.

Robert J. Morgan, an author and pastor, has written the book "100 Bible Verses everyone should know by heart" He says this about storing: "Remember, whenever we store away a verse in our minds, it becomes a concealed weapon. It's a light, a lamp, a vault of gold, a hive of honey, and a two-edged sword. It's available day and night for practical purposes. It helps us "fix" our thoughts, and we fix our thoughts by fixing them on Jesus via His praiseworthy Word."

1. Take a look at the following passages and then answer the questions:

Prov. 7:1-3

Here are specific actions we are to take regarding the Word. What do you think the author meant by each of these phrases?

"Keep my teaching as the apple of your eye"

"Bind them on your fingers"

"Write them on the tablet of your heart"

John 15:7

The definition of abide: to remain stable or fixed in a state. According to this verse, why is it important to have God's word abiding in us?

Col 3:16

Think of someone you know personally, who has God's Word "dwelling" **in them**, "richly".

In what specific ways does this make a difference in their everyday life?

Notice this translation of Deuteronomy 6:4-7 from the Contemporary English Version: "Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only true God! So, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. Memorize his laws and tell them to your children over and over again."

"When you memorize biblical texts, you're putting frames around the verses and hanging them on the walls of your inner library. And you'll find as you visualize them that you're always in the picture". Robert Morgan

Jeremiah 31:33

Who does the writing?

We can do the memorizing, but we are completely dependent upon God and His Spirit to "fix" them", "write them" on our hearts and minds in a way that has an effect on our daily living.

2. In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist is declaring that storing up the Word in his heart and mind will keep him from sinning. Are you willing to try an experiment while covering the lessons in this study?

Take some time with the Lord and ask for His thoughts. What is a habitual sin in your life? If you have trouble thinking of one, ask your spouse or close friend for their input! Find one or two verses or short Bible passages that present specific truths that help motivate you to fight against this sin. Begin to commit these verses to memory. Be on the lookout to see how the Lord uses these stored truths to help you in your battle against sin and temptation.

3. Read and pray through 119: 1-16. Use specific verses to share with the Lord your desire to walk in His statutes, store up His Word, and delight in His ways. Thank Him for specific gifts found in His Word.

“Someone once told me that Scripture memory accelerates the transformation process in our lives. It’s like a special additive that exponentially increases the efficiency of sanctification. By internalizing Bible verses, we’re mainstreaming God’s thoughts into our conscious, subconscious, and unconscious logic.”

Robert Morgan

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:10

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

Isaiah 40:8

Day 4

Read 119:1-16 and Psalm 1

1. What connections and similarities do you see between these two passages?

The lush and flowering tree in Psalm 1 is a beautiful picture of the person who delights in and meditates on the Word of God. Throughout Psalm 119, we will see this overarching theme: The one who knows, follows and delights in God and His Word, although not promised a life free of suffering, will live a fruitful and an abundant life, both here on the earth and in heaven for all eternity. There is supreme value and abundant blessing in knowing, obeying, and delighting in God's Word. In fact, our very lives, while on this earth and for all eternity, are dependent upon this life-giving Word!

2. To see additional blessings promised to those who love and follow God's ways, look up the following passages and answer these questions for each passage:

Deuteronomy 5: 28-6:3 and 6:17-19

- What are the specific blessings mentioned?

- Who will receive the blessing?

3. The Bible contains well over 1000 pages and it's filled with instructions and commands. How can we begin to remember and obey all the commandments contained in it?

Exactly what **are** the commandments we are to fix our eyes on/obey?

The following passages show us where to begin. Take some time to read and reflect on what the Lord is asking of His chosen people, both the Israelites and us, today, as His followers.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Matthew 22:36-40

Mark 12:28-31

John 15:12-17

- Which commands does Jesus say are most important?

- Can you think of a biblical command that wouldn't be obeyed by keeping the first two commandments?

4. Take time for reflection and dialogue with your Lord and Savior.

- How does He want you to grow in loving Him with all your heart, mind and soul?

- Are you aware of other things or people that you are loving more than God?

5. Take time to pray. Declare your utter dependence upon Him to help you love Him with all that you are. Confess and repent of specific ways you haven't been loving God or people as much as you love yourself. Thank Him for the precious, undeserved gift of His forgiveness.

“Scripture has power that is supernatural, soothing convicting, transforming, life-changing, timely, timeless, and eternal. Nothing beats having the Word of God stored away in the chambers of the mind.”

Robert Morgan

“Scripture memory: It's like painting the inside of your mind with God's colors, one brushstroke at a time.”

Robert Morgan

Day 5

Read 119:1-16

Starting with verse 4, the psalmist begins a heartfelt prayer **to** his LORD that continues throughout the psalm. David Powlison explains the psalm this way: "Psalm 119 is a personal prayer. Its where I go to learn utter and utterly appropriate honesty. I learn how to open my heart about what matters, to the person I most trust. It's relentless, not repetitive. It's personal, not propositional: Lord, you spoke. You acted. I need You. Make me into what You say I should be. Do what You say You'll do. I love You."

1. Circle the many Godward requests the psalmist makes in these first two stanzas.

It's obvious that the author recognizes his need for divine help to obey. He knows he can't keep the Lord's precepts in his own strength. Here's my simple translation of verses 5 and 8. "I am trying to, oh, how I want to keep your statutes, but I often don't. Please, Lord, do not utterly forsake me!" The psalmist is one of us- A fellow sinner who wants to do right, but often doesn't. How does he deal with this frustration in his prayer?

2. What words/attitudes describe the author's understanding of his weaknesses and his dependence upon divine help to grow in obedience?

3. Paul describes this very tension between our flesh vs. godly desires in Romans 7.

Romans 7:15-8:11

In what specific ways can you relate?

From this passage in Romans, record specific hopes and graces that are available to you, as a believer and follower of Jesus Christ:

Each verse in 9-16 begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *beth*. The word *beth* also means, "a house". Herbert Lockyer notes, "the underlying thought of the stanza is" "making our heart a home for the Word of God". Lockyer, *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, 542

Maybe you are familiar with the booklet, "My Heart: Christ's Home," written in 1951 by Robert Boyd Munger, a Presbyterian minister, here's an excerpt from it to help us consider this concept of "making our heart a home for the Word of God".

"We walked next into the living room. This room was rather intimate and comfortable. I liked it. It had a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a sofa, and a quiet atmosphere. He, (Christ) also seemed pleased with it. He said, "This is indeed a delightful room. Let us come here often. It is secluded and quiet, and we can fellowship together." Well, naturally as a young Christian I was thrilled. I couldn't think of anything I would rather do than have a few minutes with Christ in intimate companionship. He promised, "I will be here early every morning. Meet me here, and we will start the day together." So, morning after morning, I would come downstairs to the living room and He would take a book of the Bible from the bookcase. He would

open it and then we would read together. He would tell me of its riches and unfold to me its truths. He would make my heart warm as He revealed His love and His grace He had toward me. These were wonderful hours together. In fact, we called the living room the "withdrawing room." It was a period when we had our quiet time together. But, little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, this time began to be shortened. Why, I don't know, but I thought I was just too busy to spend time with Christ. This was not intentional, you understand; it just happened that way. Finally, not only was the time shortened, but I began to miss a day now and then. It was examination time at the university. Then it was some other urgent emergency. I would miss it two days in a row and often more.

As I passed the living room, the door was open. Looking in, I saw a fire in the fireplace and Jesus was sitting there. Suddenly in dismay I thought to myself, "He was my guest. I invited Him into my heart! He has come as Lord of my home. And yet here I am neglecting Him." I turned and went in. With downcast glance, I said, "Blessed Master, forgive me. Have You been here all these mornings?" "Yes," He said, "I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you." Then I was even more ashamed. He had been faithful in spite of my faithlessness?). I asked His forgiveness and He readily forgave me as He does when we are truly repentant. "The trouble with you is this: you have been thinking of the quiet time, of the Bible study and prayer time, as a factor in your own spiritual progress, but you have forgotten that this hour means something to me also. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at great cost. I value your fellowship. Now," He said, "do not neglect this hour if only for my sake. Whatever else may be your desire, remember I want your fellowship!" You know, the truth that Christ desires my companionship, that He loves me, wants me to be with Him, wants to be with me and waits for me, has done more to transform my quiet time with God than any other single fact. Don't let Christ wait alone in the living room of your heart, but every day find some time when, with your Bible and in prayer, you may be together with Him."

4. Take some time to seek the Lord's perspective and answer the following questions:

- How does my Savior want me to grow in making my heart a home for the Living Word of God?
- What steps can I take to store up God's Word in my heart?
- Ask the Lord to search your heart. Confess specific ways you have disobeyed and not kept His precepts diligently. Are there specific areas of your life where you are conveniently forgetting His Word and doing things your own way?
- Is there specific sin that is hardening your heart towards God and/or His Word or causing you to wander from His commandments? Is there an area of life where you are making a habit of disobeying His Word? If so, seize the opportunity to repent, and then receive the forgiveness and cleansing that our gracious Savior promises, to those who humble themselves and confess.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Proverbs 28:13

5. To conclude lesson 1, I encourage you to choose one or more verses from 1-16 to memorize. Write out the verse(s) and begin committing to memory. As we continue through Psalm 119, please also consider choosing 1 or more stanzas to hide in your heart. Ask your small group to join you! This could be a perfect time for some friendly competition/motivation!

“When we memorize a word, phrase, line, or verse from God's Word, it's like implanting a powerful radioactive speck of the very mind of God into our own finite brains. As we learn it “by heart,” it descends into the hidden crevices and fissures of our souls. As we meditate on it, it begins sending out its quiet, therapeutic waves of influence.” Robert Morgan

Appendix

Five Tips for Bible Memory (by David Mathis)

Some Scripture memory systems are amazingly involved. They can include boxes of memorized verses on cards, or long lists of previously memorized verses for review. I admire and appreciate those who have persevered in these systems and found them life-giving and sustainable in the long run. For me, such a process would threaten to dominate, if not devour, the limited time I realistically have on a daily basis for devotions.

Instead, I've found Scripture memory to be for me a tool in the belt of meditation, and one important pathway for Bible application. Meditation is the nonnegotiable habit of grace I want to practice each day, even if only briefly when life circumstances have crunched my time. Scripture memory is not something, at least in every season of life, that I practice daily, but I aim on a weekly basis, if not a couple times each week, to spend several minutes seeking to memorize some powerful text I've come across in my Bible reading and want not only to meditate, but memorize, for my own soul or for the sake of ministry to others.

Here are five simple tips for Scripture memorization.

1. Diversify Your Picks

You can memorize whole books, or whole chapters (Romans 8 is a great starting point, or Philippians 3), or key sections.² My preference over the years has become key sections (say four to seven verses, like Titus 3:1–7) that I come across as I'm moving through a Bible-reading plan. It's often a section I find so densely rich that meditating on it for just a few minutes feels woefully inadequate. To enjoy more of its goodness, I need to put it to memory. (If you're looking to get started on a few key sections to memorize, try Col. 1:15–20; John 1:1–14; Heb. 1:1–4; and Phil. 2:5–11.)

Resist the urge to see simple memory as the goal. . . . Don't memorize mindlessly but engage the text and its meaning.

2. Take It with You During the Day

Write the passage down or make it prominent and easily accessible on a tablet or phone. I wouldn't suggest quarantining your memorizing to a certain slot in the day but unleash it into all of life. Play an audio recording in the car, look at a piece of paper while standing in line. Put a text on your home screen so you see it when you look at your smartphone.

3. Seek to Understand, Feel, and Apply the Text as You Memorize

Resist the urge to see simple memory as the goal. Learning the text "by heart" is secondary; taking the text to heart is primary. Don't memorize mindlessly but engage the text and its meaning—not only its implications for your life, but what effects it should have on your emotions.

4. Turn Your Text into Prayer

Personal and corporate prayer times are a great time to exercise what you're memorizing and see and feel it from a fresh angle as you turn it Godward and express its significance for others. There have been times for me when praying some memorized text became the pathway for seeing fresh glories that had been hidden to me until then.

5. Memorize in Light of the Gospel

Finally, let the truth of Colossians 3:16 shape your memorization: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The "word of Christ" here, or "message of Christ," isn't first and foremost Scripture, but the gospel. So, in other words, memorize in light of the gospel.

Memorizing Scripture, in and of itself, isn't necessarily Christian. Jesus spoke with Jewish leaders who had memorized more of the Old Testament than we ever will, and he said to them, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40). And Paul spoke about Jews who intimately knew the Scriptures, but their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil

remains uplifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (2 Cor. 3:14–16)

Whether we're memorizing texts from the Old Testament or the New, this is our need again and again: to turn to the Lord. In our memorizing, whether whole books or chapters or passages or single verses, we always must keep in mind Jesus's great lessons in Luke 24 about Bible interpretation: "He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27), and "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," and that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44–45).

Sample daily procedure:

The following is an example of how someone could go about memorizing Ephesians at the rate of one verse per day (Andrew Davis, An Approach to the Extended Memorization of Scripture)

1) Day one: Read Ephesians 1:1 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. **Be sure to include the verse number.** Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

2) Day two: **Yesterday's verse first!!** Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:1 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. Now, do your new verse. Read Ephesians 1:2 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. **Be sure to include the verse number.** Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

3) Day three: **Yesterday's verse first!!** Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:2 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Again, you should look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. **Old verses next, altogether:** Recite Ephesians 1:1-2 together once, being sure to include the verse numbers. Now, **do your new verse.** Read Ephesians 1:3 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. **Be sure to include the verse number.** Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

4) Day four: **Yesterday's verse first!!** Recite yesterday's verse, Ephesians 1:3 ten times, being sure to include the verse number. Again, you should look in the Bible if you need to, just to refresh your memory. **Old verses next, altogether:** Recite Ephesians 1:1-3 together once, being sure to include the verse numbers. Now, do your **new verse.** Read Ephesians 1:4 out loud ten times, looking at each word as if photographing it with your eyes. **Be sure to include the verse number.** Then cover the page and recite it ten times. You're done for the day.

This cycle would continue through the entire book. Obviously, the **"old verses altogether"** stage will soon swell to take the most time of all. That's exactly the way it should be. The entire book of Ephesians

can be read at a reasonable rate in less than fifteen minutes. Therefore, the "old verses altogether" stage of your review should not take longer than that on any given day. Do it with the Bible ready at hand, in case you draw a blank or get stuck... there's no shame in looking, and it actually helps to nail down troublesome verses, so they will never be trouble again.

“If you ever longed for a life of deep and fruitful prayer, give yourself to the Word of God. Read it. Think about it. Memorize it. Be shaped by it.”

John Piper

*“Merciful Father, thank you for being a prayer-hearing God.
Oh, that we would cherish this gift.
It is an overwhelming thought that the
Creator and sustainer of all things gives
Heed to our prayers and meets our needs.
Make us persistent and watchful and thankful and ready for every
open door.
Fill our mouths with prayer to You and gospel to others.
Increase our faith in the truth that by prayer
We have an influence in the world all out of
Proportion with how small we are.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen”*

John Piper

Lesson 2: Psalm 119:17-40

“Open my eyes, that I may behold
Wonderful things out of your law.”

Psalm 119:18

Supplicate: ask or beg for something earnestly or humbly.

Day 1

During this lesson we will look at the second discipline,

Supplicate: ask or beg for something earnestly or humbly.

Psalm 119 is ripe with supplications! What specific things does the psalmist earnestly beg God to do for him? What can we learn about prayer, or supplications, from listening in and interacting with the author's humble pleas?

In growing to understand this psalm and write this study, I have found David Powlison's article on "Suffering and Psalm 119" to be instrumental. Below, I am including several of his thoughts/quotes, so that you may benefit. I encourage you to refer back to his thoughts often, as we continue searching for gold in Ps 119.

"Psalm 119 is the most extensive I-to-You conversation in the Bible. After verse 3, for the next 172 straight verses we hear what a man says out loud in God's presence; his joyous pleasure, vocal need, open adoration, blunt requests, candid assertions, deep struggles, fiercely good intentions; it's an outcry of faith".

1. Read verses 119: 17-40, and circle or record the many different blunt and passionate requests the psalmist makes of the Lord.

There are 9 requests in verses 33-40 alone, with several more in verses 17-32.

Notice the I-You references, which are used in every verse, beginning in verse 4.

2. What are the psalmist's reasons for making these requests? In other words, what are the benefits he is hoping to receive? (v.17, 18, 27, 33, 34)

"The plain, fluent words you overhear in Psalm 119 spring from a man already persuaded. He simply talks, fusing his intellect, will, emotions, circumstances, desires, fears, needs, memory, and anticipation. He's keenly aware of what he's really like. He's keenly aware of what's happening to him. He's keenly aware of the LORD and the relevance of what the LORD sees, says, and does. Such awareness makes him very direct and very personal. The living heart of a man tumbles out in passionate requests and passionate affirmations. He persuades us not by argument, but by infectious, vocal faith".

David Powlison

J.I. Packer makes this bold statement regarding our prayers, "I believe that prayer is the measure of the man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face."

3. What do you learn about the psalmist from listening in on his prayers?

- What are the psalmist's fears/concerns? (v.19, 25, 31)
- How would you describe the emotions expressed?

- What does the psalmist want God to “remove” or “take away”? (v.22, 29, 37, 39)

- What are his affirmations/declarations about God? His Word? (v.18, 23, 24, 25, 28)

4. Using verses or phrases from 17-40, write out a personal, honest prayer to the Lord, sharing your fears and concerns, your requests, and declarations regarding God, His character and His Word.

5. Spend a few moments storing up the verses or passages you have chosen to hide in your heart.

*“O God, hear my prayer;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.”*

Psalm 54:2

Q: What is prayer?

*A: Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,
For things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ,
With confession of our sins,
And thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.*

Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 98

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with
thanksgiving.”*

Colossians 4:2

Day 2

“Psalm 119 is the thoughtful outcry that rises when real life meets real God. A person who has listened opens his heart to the Person who has spoken. Psalm 119 gets you about the business of a living dialogue with the Person whose opinion finally matters.”
David Powlison

1. Read Psalm 119:17-40.

- In a sentence or two, how would you describe the psalmist's circumstances?

- In what ways does David allow his circumstances to intersect with specific truths from the breathing, living Word?

- Where, specifically, does David believe he will find hope and life?

Take some time to think about your prayer life...

Are you familiar with the psalmist's way of praying, or does it seem foreign to you? Do you think about prayer with a sense of guilt/condemnation, knowing you should pray, but struggling to do so? Write down a few reflections you have about your prayer life.

2. Let's take a look at how Jesus prioritized prayer while He walked on the earth, fully God, yet fully Man. Then, answer the following questions.

Matthew 14:1-13, 26:36-44

Mark 1:29-35; 6:30-46

Luke 5:15-16; 6:6-12

Hebrews 5:7

- What were some of the circumstances when Jesus prayed?
- What were His thoughtful cries when real life met real God?
- What emotions did Jesus express while praying?
- In what ways does the psalmist imitate Jesus while praying?
- What impacted you the most from these passages about how Jesus prayed?

How does the fact that Jesus intentionally made time to pray change or deepen your desire to pray? If Jesus needed to pray, what does that say about us?

Do you have a consistent plan for “getting away to pray”? I encourage you to be ruthless and creative in scheduling regular times to engage and fellowship with your Savior and Shepherd. This could mean getting up earlier than your kids a couple of times per week! Consider trading babysitting with a fellow mom, taking an overnight at a local retreat center, or spending a couple of hours with your journal and Bible at a local coffee shop.

Even if frequent times of “getting away” isn’t an option for you in this season of life, consider the heart and desire of this mother: Perhaps you’ve heard the story of Susanna Wesley, mother of Charles and John Wesley. Susanna, a mother of 19 children, understood the importance of prayer. Although not able to get off by herself in the midst of such a busy household, when Susanna threw her apron over her head, her children knew not to disturb her, as this was her time to pray and commune with the Lord!

Take some extended time to pray today. What fears, requests, praises would you like to share with the Lord, as you consider how your real life meets with your real God?

What relevant truths has God spoken in His Word that can bring perspective and hope to your present situation?

Have a living dialogue with the One who created you and chose you before time began; the One who loves you with “an everlasting love”. Jeremiah 31:3

“Pray without ceasing” I Thessalonians 5:17 means “we should pray over and over, and often. Our default mental state should be “O God, help....”

John Piper

Ps 119 is not information about the Bible, it's speech therapy for the inarticulate”.

David Powlison

“O Father of glory, this is the cry of our hearts-to be changed from one degree of glory to another, until, in the resurrection, at the last trumpet, we are completely conformed to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Until then, we long to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord, especially the knowledge of his glory. We want to see it as clearly as we see the sun, and to savor it as deeply as our most desired pleasure. O merciful God incline our hearts to your Word and the wonders of your glory. Wean us from our obsession with trivial things. Open the eyes of our hearts to see each day what the created universe is telling about your glory. Enlighten our minds to see the glory of your Son in the Gospel. We believe that you are the All-glorious One, and that there is none like you. Help our unbelief. Forgive the wandering of our affections and the undue attention we give to lesser things. Have mercy on us for Christ's sake, and fulfill in us your great design to display the glory of your grace. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

John Piper.

Day 3

1. Today, take time to go back to the beginning and read verses **1-40**, paying attention to the different requests or prayers the psalmist makes regarding his eyes.

- What does the psalmist want to fix his eyes on? v. 6, 15
- What does he want the Lord to do with his eyes? v.18

In verse 18, the author asks the Lord to open his eyes. The Hebrew word used here for the verb “open” is the same word used in the story of Balaam in Numbers 22:31. when “the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam” so that he could see “the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword.

This word “open” “has to do with removing a veil.” James M. Boice

(If you have time, check out this real-life Dr. Doolittle story in Numbers 22! If our God can make a donkey speak, He can certainly hear our prayers!)

The psalmist understands his desperate need for the Lord's help to understand, value and obey God's Word. I believe he is saying, “Unless You remove the veil from my cloudy, dull eyes, Lord, I will never see Your glory, your awesomeness, or the wondrous things in Your Holy Word.”

- What does David ask the Lord to turn his eyes away from, in verse 37?

John Bunyan refers to this verse in his book, “Pilgrim's Progress”:
While Christian and Faithful are making their way to the Celestial City, they come to a yearlong event called, Vanity Fair, where “pleasures and delights of all sorts” are sold. “The 2 pilgrims had no interest in looking upon these wares, and if asked to buy something, “they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry, turn away mine

eyes from beholding vanity, and look upwards, signifying that their trade and traffic was in heaven". When asked what they would like to buy, the pilgrims answered, "We buy the truth".

Pilgrim's Progress

2. A few questions to ponder:

- Are there worthless things I am gazing at, that are either:
Hardening my heart toward or dulling my hunger for
Godward things? Or,
Hindering me from spending time in the Word and prayer?
- According to verse 37, what is the opposite of
"experiencing life"?
- Where does life come from according to verses 25, 37, 40?

3. In Luke 11:34-36, what is the sober truth Jesus teaches us regarding our eyes?

4. Read Psalm 121 and 123 and notice the many times eyes are mentioned.

- How should we look? Where should we look?

5. To see what our Lord's eyes look upon, check out these verses. Remember that as surrendered believers in Jesus, God covers us with the blameless, spotless blood of His Son. Jesus clothes us with His robe of righteousness. Hallelujah!

2Chronicles 16:9,

1 Peter 3:12

Read I Corinthians 2:9.

Think back to the most incredibly beautiful places you have seen with your own eyes, either in person or in a picture. Offer a shout of praise to the Lord for the promise of what your eyes will behold in the future!

- What specific truth from Scripture and/or which of God's attributes, would it serve you to gaze upon today, as you consider your current emotions, circumstances, desires, fear and needs?

6. Compose a prayer, asking the Lord to fix your eyes on these specific truths. Confess and repent of any ways you are looking at worthless things. Thank Him for specific ways He has his eyes on you.

*“Oh, how we love your Word, Father!
It is precious beyond all earthly treasures.
Incline our hearts to this Word,
And break our bondage to other things.
Let us see wonders in it.
Pierce through our soul and waken spiritual life.
Confirm the marrow of our faith and make us real,
Through and through. Forbid that we would be false to Your
faithfulness,
And make us mighty in the Spirit.
Through Christ, we pray. Amen “*

John Piper

*“Prayer is the nearest approach to God, and the highest enjoyment
of Him that we are capable of in this life”.*

William Law (1686-1761)

Day 4

1. Read 119:17-40

- How does the psalmist respond to the painful realities of scorn, sorrow, reproach, and loneliness?
- Do these feelings turn the psalmist towards himself (self-pity), downward into despair, or upward?
- What specific phrases help you come to this conclusion?

2. The psalmist is v. 25 "laid low "and "melting away in sorrow" v. 28, and yet, he makes Godward choices.

Record the deliberate actions he takes in these stanzas. A few examples are found in verses 23, 24, 30-32.

Notice the author's declaration in verse 26. He talks with the Lord about his ways (actions). He lays it all out on the table.

The King James version puts v.26 like this:

26. I have declared my ways, and You heard me; teach me Your statutes.

Charles Spurgeon, in *The Treasury of David*, says this about v 26:" A beautiful description of the "simplicity and godly sincerity" of the believer's "walk with God!" **He spreads his whole case before his God, "declaring his ways" of sinfulness, of difficulty, and of conduct.** And, indeed, it is our privilege to acquaint our Father with all our care and need, that we may be pitied by His love, and guided by His counsel, and confirmed by His strength. Who would not find relief by unbosoming himself to his Father? This showing of ourselves to God—

declaring our ways of sin before Him without deceit—is the short and sure way of rest.”

Consider this explanation from David Powlison, pertaining to the psalm as a whole, but certainly true of this specific verse: “Psalm 119 is about life’s painful realities. And it is about the gifts of God. And it is about how those two meet, talk, come to grips, and find life’s highest delight.”

4. Read I Peter 2:18-25 and reflect on our Savior’s response to His suffering.

- What are Jesus’ painful realities?
- How do the gifts of God meet and make a difference in Jesus’ painful realities?

Now look back at verses 17-40.

What are the painful realities David is facing?

- Which “gifts of God” are presented in our text?
- How do David’s painful realities intersect with God’s gifts?

5. To end our time today, dialogue with the Lord. Spread your whole case before Him. Speak His truth back to Him. With thanksgiving, declare “open adoration”; in humility, cry out with “blunt requests”. Allow His gifts to intersect with your reality.

6. Spend a few minutes working on your memory verses from Lesson 1.

“The Christian life is a life of being carried from beginning to end. We work. Yet it is not we, but God who works within us” I Corinthians 15:10.

John Piper

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful”

Hebrews 10:23 NIV

“Beginning the day with the Word of God is crucial, therefore prayer is equally crucial since the Word will not open its best wonders to us without prayer”

John Piper

Day 5

1. Read 119:17-40, and then circle or highlight the three times the psalmist refers to his heart.

In order to love and obey God with all his heart, what does the psalmist know needs to happen?
(v.32, 34, 36)

The psalmist declares that he can only run in the way of the Lord's commandments WHEN the Lord enlarges his heart!

The ESV Study Bible says this of "enlarge my heart":
"Or "make my heart broad"; cf. I Kings 4:29, where "breadth of heart or mind" is an expanded ability to perceive God's truth."

Charles Spurgeon gives this commentary on verse 32. "Yes, the heart is the master; the feet soon run when the heart is free and energetic. Let the affections be aroused and eagerly set on divine things, and our actions will be full of force, swiftness, and delight. **God must work in us first**, and then we shall will and do according to his good pleasure. **He must change** the heart, unite the heart, encourage the heart, strengthen the heart, and enlarge the heart, and then the course of the life will be gracious, sincere, happy, and earnest; so that from our lowest up to our highest state in grace **we must attribute all** to the free favor of our God." emphasis, mine.

Through the psalmist's "vocal need, open adoration, blunt requests, candid assertions, deep struggles, fiercely good intentions" we are made aware of the tension in his life, (and the life of every follower of Jesus,) between God's part and our part. For the remainder of today's lesson, we will look at a few of the specific things God promises to do in the life of every believer, as well as what our responsibilities are, as a member of His family.

In modern language, the psalmist's prayer might sound like this,
"Lord, from reading Your Word I know I am to run towards You and

Your Kingdom ways. I want to run, but I so often walk with a limp, fall down or even sinfully run in the opposite direction. I acknowledge that I can't begin to run towards You, towards obedience, towards understanding and delight, without Your divine, immediate and constant help!! Please, dear God, enlarge my heart!"

2. Read 17-40 and fill in the chart considering this question:
What does the psalmist ask **God** to do and what actions does the **psalmist** commit to do?

Lord, I can only do this:

If/when You do this:

3. Take a look at a few other passages that describe this tension:

Philippians 2:12-13

Eph 3:20

Phil 1:6

Hebrews 13:20-21

In your own words how would you describe the things God promises to do for us and the specific things He asks us to do when it comes to our sanctification/growing in godliness?

4. Compose a prayer to the Lord, using verses 33-40 as your guide. Ask Him to teach you something specific. Plead with Him for understanding about a certain spiritual topic. Humbly request His leading in a particular circumstance. Declare your dependence and desire that He incline your heart towards a specific obedience.

Let this truth from I Thessalonians 5:24 fill your heart and mind with hope and faith, as you bring your requests before Him.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it”!

Father teach me_____

Give me understanding in_____

Lead me in this situation_____

Incline my heart towards obedience in this area_____

Thank you for_____

5. Select one or more verses from this lesson to store up. Spend time committing verses from this lesson and lesson 1 to memory.