

# Psalm 119

In this lesson we're going to take a look at Psalm 119. This is the longest psalm in the book of Psalms, and it's also the longest chapter in the Bible! It has a staggering 176 verses. As you might imagine it's possible to spend a long time studying this psalm. Since we only have one lesson we're going to cover it fairly quickly.

One key fact about this psalm is that it's *not* a set of 176 random verses. If you look at your Bible you'll see that it's composed of 22 sections of 8 verses each. Each of those 22 sections is labeled with a different Hebrew letter: aleph, beth, gimel, etc. What this means is that the verses in each section start with that particular letter. For example, the 8 verses in the "Aleph" section all start with the letter aleph, the 8 verses in the "Beth" section all start with the letter beth, and so forth. That Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm. (This isn't the only passage in the Bible that's like this. Part of Proverbs 31 is also an acrostic.)

Psalm 119 has several themes. Let's take a look at each section and see what we can discover.

## Aleph

The psalm begins by telling us that God blesses those who keep His Word:

**Psalm 119:1-2:** "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart."

This section ends with the psalmist promising to keep God's Word:

**Psalm 119:8:** “I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.”

The message here is straightforward: God blesses those who keep His commandments and walk in His ways. Obedience is a central part of being blessed! The psalmist promises to keep God's Law and do God's will.

## **Beth**

The “Beth” section tells us that keeping God's commandments leads to sanctification:

**Psalm 119:9:** “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

**Psalm 119:11:** “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

As a Christian, how do you achieve sanctification? How do you change your ways and lead a holy life that please the Lord? One of the ways to do this is by memorizing God's Word and keeping His commandments. Psalm 119 tells us if you do that then you'll cleanse your way. That's one way Christians can change their life and learn not to sin against God.

The psalmist closes this section by making a promise:

**Psalm 119:16:** “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.”

The psalmist promises to delight himself in the Word of God and memorize so he won't sin against the Lord. “Aleph” told us that obedience to God's Word brings blessings, and “Beth” told us the Word also brings sanctification and a changed life.

## Gimel

The “Gimel” section tells us that we're strangers and pilgrims in this world:

**Psalm 119:19:** “I am a stranger in the earth:  
hide not thy commandments from me.”

Not only are we strangers, but it seems we're in enemy territory:

**Psalm 119:23:** “Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.”

At this point we can see a journey take place. In “Aleph” we saw a new Christian come to know the Lord and rejoice in His commandments. In “Beth” the Christian began to study the Word, memorize it, and apply it to his life. The process of sanctification was beginning! In “Gimel” the new Christian learned that the world was no longer his friend. He was now a stranger in a strange land. The world was against him – but all was not lost. He had a plan:

**Psalm 119:24:** “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.”

What did this Christian do when people spoke out against him? He delighted himself in God's Word. He went to the Word to find comfort and counseling. He let the Word guide him.

## Daleth

The “Daleth” section tells us that not only did princes speak out against him, but his life became even harder. The new Christian was grievously afflicted:

**Psalm 119:25:** "My soul cleaveth unto the dust:  
quicken thou me according to thy word."

He was now experiencing a period of terrible suffering. His soul was afflicted and troubled:

**Psalm 119:28:** "My soul melteth for heaviness:  
strengthen thou me according unto thy word."

In this time of trouble, where did the Christian run to strength? The Word of God. The persecution he experienced didn't cause him to run *from* God; instead it caused him to run *to* God and to the words that He had given in the Scriptures! The trials of "Daleth" caused the Christian to ask for grace so that he might stand strong and walk in God's ways:

**Psalm 119:32:** "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

The Christian hadn't wavered. Instead he sought grace from God.

## He

In the "He" section, the Christian battled against his own desires. He sought to abandon his love for the world and learn to delight in the things of God:

**Psalm 119:36-37:** "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way."

1 John 2:15-17 commands us to love not the world,

because the things of this world aren't the things of God. Those who love the world don't truly love God because this world is the enemy of both God and His disciples. This new Christian has come to understand that concept and is seeking to change his desires. He doesn't want to long after worldly and sinful things anymore! Instead he seeks to delight himself in the Word.

In the past he longed for carnal things. Now he longed for something very different:

**Psalm 119:40:** “Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.”

In “Beth” we were told that memorizing the Word and learning to walk in it would further the process of sanctification. In “He” we see this coming true: the Word was changing the Christian's desires. He didn't want the things he used to want. Now he longed for the things of God. The new Christian was being transformed.

## **Waw**

In the “Waw” section people began questioning the Christian's beliefs:

**Psalm 119:42:** “So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.”

There may come a time when Christians are asked to defend what they believe. Why do we believe in the Word of God? Why aren't we more like the world? Why do we obey God and do what's right in His sight? This new Christian needs to have an answer to these questions – and since he's spent his time memorizing the Word of God he has that answer. Since he trusts in the Word he's able to answer those who attack him and demand a reason for his faith. Even if he's questioned by the government

he can answer with confidence:

**Psalm 119:46:** “I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.”

This section ends with the psalmist explaining the secret to his boldness and confidence:

**Psalm 119:48:** “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.”

This Christian loves the Word. He's studied it and continues to meditate upon it. He's hidden it in his heart. When he's questioned he knows what to say. When he's attacked he has a defense. When the world comes against him he runs to the Word of God.

Notice that this Christian doesn't use clever arguments or worldly tricks. He doesn't try to impress anyone with his brilliance. Instead he answers his opponents with the Word. He's not ashamed of the gospel because he knows it's the power of God.

## Zayin

In “Waw” we saw that the Christian used the Word to answer his accusers. If this was a movie then his accusers would have seen the error of his ways and repented of their sins. However, our life isn't always like that. Even though this Christian has answered his enemies and preached the Word to them, his life hasn't improved. He's still being afflicted:

**Psalm 119:50-51:** “This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.”

The world hasn't become any nicer to this Christian. Instead he's held in great derision! In his time of distress, where did he find his comfort? In the Word. It's the Word that tells him how much God loves him and that God has promised him everlasting life and joy. It's the Word that tells him the fate of the righteous – and the fate of the wicked:

**Psalm 119:53:** “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.”

The wicked may be in power but this Christian isn't tempted by their worldly success. He knows the fate of the wicked and he knows the judgment that's one day coming against them, and he's filled with horror at their sins.

This Christian's time in the Word is paying off. He's learned a great deal and it's sustaining him. In fact, “Zayin” tells us that the Word has become his song:

**Psalm 119:54:** “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

When the wicked are in trouble they seek many different things to find peace and happiness. When this Christian was in trouble he knew exactly what to do: he went to the Word to find comfort and song.

## **Heth**

We've seen the new Christian seek to walk in God's ways. He delighted in the Word of God and did what was right. He even testified before rulers and preached the gospel to them! So how was he rewarded? Well, people who preach the prosperity gospel will claim that the gospel brings health and wealth to everyone. But that's simply not true (not in this life, at least). This Christian has done all the right things but the world has only oppressed him

still further:

**Psalm 119:61:** "The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law."

The "Heth" section tells us that the world went beyond simply scoffing and deriding this Christian. It's now actively robbing him! This Christian's possessions were being stolen from him. His faith was costing him something.

So what did the Christian do? He found his treasure elsewhere:

**Psalm 119:57:** "Thou art my portion, O Lord: I have said that I would keep thy words."

The wicked seek silver and gold and fame and fortune. They long for worldly treasure. This Christian is different. The world was taking his money, but that wasn't his true source of wealth. As we can see from this verse, the Lord was his portion and treasure, and the Word was his delight! When this Christian's possessions were taken from him he turned to the Lord and delighted himself in God. Instead of mourning over what he had lost he actually *gave thanks*:

**Psalm 119:62:** "At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments."

These trials didn't drive him away from God. Instead they drove him closer to God! They taught him to love God's Word even more than he did before. When everything is lost and it seems that people have nothing left, they learn what it truly means to have the Lord for your portion and God for your riches. Our God is ever faithful, and He's given wealth to His children that the world will never have. This Christian delights in the salvation that God has given to him and rejoices.



## Teth

Persecution is very difficult to endure. In “Heth” we saw that the Christian was grievously afflicted. He suffered many things and had his possessions stolen from him. In “Teth” we might expect this Christian to complain about the things God allowed to happen to him, but that's not what we find. Instead he saw these events as a blessing instead of a curse:

**Psalm 119:67:** “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.”

All of this suffering brought this Christian closer to God. Before his trials came the Christian had started to drift away from the Word. He had begun to live more like the world – but these trials brought him closer to God and back into the Word. Because of this he was thankful for the trouble he faced:

**Psalm 119:71:** “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”

That's a remarkable thing to say, isn't it? In “Teth” the Christian doesn't complain about being afflicted. Instead he was grateful because it taught him the commands of God! This Christian loved the Word and therefore loved anything that brought him closer to it. If affliction was what it took to bring him closer to God then he was grateful for it. He truly desired the Word, even if it cost him a great deal. This section ends by saying the Word meant more to this Christian than immense worldly riches:

**Psalm 119:72:** “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”

The world can keep its silver and gold. What this Christian

wants is the Word of God.

## Yod

In “Yod” the Christian demonstrates a deep understanding of theology. He first tells us that God is the one who made him:

**Psalm 119:73:** “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.”

This Christian also acknowledges that *God* is the one who had been afflicting him:

**Psalm 119:75:** “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

This brings to mind the book of Job. In that book the righteous Job was grievously afflicted. He lost his wealth, his children, and his health, because God removed the hedge of protection that was around him and allowed the devil to afflict him. Job knew that God had allowed these things to happen and he was very upset with God. Job was certain that God had wronged him, and he wanted to talk to God to set him straight. However, *Job* was the one who was wrong. He should have trusted the Lord.

In “Yod” the Christians doesn't make the same mistake as Job. He really does trust in the Lord! Even though the Lord was afflicting him he continued to trust in God. The reason he did this was because he knew the Word, and it told him that God was perfect and righteous in all He did. Since this Christian knew that all of God's judgments were right, he trusted God and accepted everything that God gave him – including affliction. When he was afflicted he went to the Lord for comfort:

**Psalm 119:76:** “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant.”

This Christian didn't run from God in times of suffering. Instead he understood that God intended the suffering for good and not for evil, because God is righteous in all that He does. That's why he went to God for mercy and comfort: he knew that God would give him the strength to get through difficult times.

The “Yod” section ends with a special request:

**Psalm 119:80:** “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed.”

This Christian asked that in this time of suffering, God would give him the grace *to obey God's commandments*. The Christian was looking for *obedience!* He wanted to do what was right so that he wouldn't sin and become ashamed. That's a remarkable thing to pray for in a time of suffering, isn't it?

## Kaph

In “Yod” the Christian acknowledged that God was behind his afflictions and asked the Lord to comfort and strengthen him. In “Kaph” we find that things have become much *worse*:

**Psalm 119:82-83:** “Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me? For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.”

In “Yod” the Christian asked God for comfort, but comfort hasn't come. He was still waiting for God while enduring a great deal of pain and suffering. The wicked were persecuting him and getting away with it:

**Psalm 119:84-85:** “How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me? The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.”

The Christian asked God for comfort but comfort didn't come. He asked for help but instead he received even more persecution. Things were so bad that he was now wondering how much longer he had to live. It seems he was in tremendous danger:

**Psalm 119:87:** “They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.”

At this point he was near death. The wicked were persecuting him and he was almost consumed. The comfort that he prayed for didn't come and he hasn't been rescued from the wicked.

So did this Christian end this section? With an unexpected request:

**Psalm 119:88:** “Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth.”

In his hour of need, when all seemed lost and death was near, this Christian asked for grace *so that he could keep God's commandments*. Even in a time of great pain his focus was on holiness! His great concern was that he would be given the strength to walk in God's ways in spite of the trouble he was in. He didn't want to sin or disobey God. Above everything else he wanted to walk in the Word – so that's what he prayed for.

## Lamedh

In “Kaph” we saw that things were looking very dire for

the Christian – but in “Lamedh” things changed. The Christian found deliverance at last:

**Psalm 119:92-93:** “Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.”

At one point death was near, but salvation had finally come. What's especially interesting is *how* deliverance came. “Lamedh” tells us that God used His Word to rescue this person out of his time of great affliction! It was the Word that saved him and delivered him from peril. If the Word hadn't been there then all would have been lost and he would have perished.

Because of this deliverance the Christian has begun to see that there's more to God's Word than he originally thought:

**Psalm 119:96:** “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.”

The works of this world can only go so far, but the further this Christian studies the Word the more treasure he finds.

## Mem

In “Mem” we're told that this Christian has become exceedingly wise:

**Psalm 119:98-99:** “Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.”

He's become wiser than his teachers and wiser than his

enemies. How did this happen? Through the Word of God. This Christian has been meditating on it. The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both wisdom (Psalm 111:10) and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). As this Christian has studied the Word he's become wise. He can now understand things that he didn't understand before.

Over time his love for the Word has grown. The Scriptures aren't boring to him. Instead they're delightful:

**Psalm 119:103:** “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

This Christian's wisdom has had an important effect on his life. Now that he has more understanding, he has a much greater dislike of sin than he had before:

**Psalm 119:104:** “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.”

God used His Word to change this Christian – which is exactly what He promised to do.

## Nun

In the “Nun” section we're told that the Word guides this Christian:

**Psalm 119:105:** “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

He doesn't just delight in the Word or meditate upon it. The Word is what guides his life and directs his actions! It illuminates his entire life and causes him to see things differently. Not only does it light his path, but it also causes him to rejoice:

**Psalm 119:111:** “Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart.”

Despite the difficulties that he faced, he's determined to stand firm. He will continue to follow the Word to the end of his days:

**Psalm 119:112:** “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end.”

The trials of his life have troubled him but they haven't caused him to abandon God. He's going to stay the course.

## Samekh

In the “Samekh” section we're told that the wicked are tempting this Christian to fall into sin. However, he has refused to yield to the temptation:

**Psalm 119:115:** “Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.”

He has no interest in sinning or in keeping company with the wicked. This Christian understands the ultimate fate of the wicked:

**Psalm 119:118-119:** “Thou hast trodden down all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies.”

The Bible warns us about the great and terrible day of judgment that's coming, and the wrath that will be poured out upon all of the wicked. This Christian has studied the Word and

understands that everything is not as it seems. The wicked aren't getting away with anything; instead they're storing up wrath against themselves. This Christian chooses to fear God and obey His commandments. He won't join the wicked in their evil ways.

## Ayin

In the “Ayin” section we discover that this Christian held firm against temptation. The wicked tried to corrupt him but he held fast and did what was right:

**Psalm 119:121:** “I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.”

Why was this Christian faithful? It's because he understands who he is. He realizes that he's God's servant and his life isn't his own:

**Psalm 119:125:** “I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies.”

Since he's God's servant he seeks wisdom. Why? So that he might understand the Word of God and obey it! He wants to be wise in the Word so he can do what's right. That's his great passion in life: to walk in God's ways. Above all else he wants to honor God with his life. That's why he has such a deep love of God's commands:

**Psalm 119:127-128:** “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.”

The wicked crave silver and its gold, but this Christian



truly loves the commandments of God. He hates what's evil and loves what's good and right. That's been the theme of his life.

## Pe

In the “Pe” section the Christian starts to broaden his focus. He's come to realize that the Word of God can do more than change *his* life. It can also impact the lives of those around him:

**Psalm 119:130:** “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”

This Christian still seeks deliverance from the wicked and the trials he's facing. But he's also greatly moved by the fact the wicked don't keep the law of God:

**Psalm 119:136:** “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law.”

The reason he's in tears is *not* because the wicked are oppressing him. It's because the wicked aren't walking in the light of the Word. They're lost in their sins and are walking in their own foolishness, and it breaks his heart. This Christian wants everyone have the same love and respect for the Word that he has.

## Tsadde

In the “Tsadde” section we're told that this Christian has a powerful zeal to spread the knowledge of the Word of God to those who don't have it:

**Psalm 119:139:** “My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy

words.”

We've seen throughout this psalm that he is indeed full of zeal! This man deeply loves the Word and passionately seeks to keep it and walk by its light. He's come to understand something deep and powerful:

**Psalm 119:142:** “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth.”

There's nothing fleeting or temporary about the Word, or the righteousness that comes from the gospel. When God gives us the righteousness of Christ it's an *everlasting* righteousness that will never fade away. The Word of God will endure forever throughout all generations! The new life that God gives us is indeed an everlasting life (John 3:16).

## Qoph

Despite the faithfulness of this Christian he's not immune to trouble and sorrow. In fact, in the “Qoph” section he's become overwhelmed with grief:

**Psalm 119:145-147:** “I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word.”

Some people teach that if you're living right then you won't have problems. They say God wants to give everyone wealth and happiness, and all you have to do is claim it and it will be yours. But what we see in the Bible is that even faithful Christians who stand against evil and do what's right can still experience times of tremendous sorrow and grief! This isn't

unexpected or strange because even Christ was referred to as the man of sorrows – a man well-acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

What does this Christian do when he's broken and sad? He hopes in the Word. He goes to the Word for comfort and support and he keeps the commandments of God. In both good times and in bad the Word is never far away.

## Resh

As we've seen, the story of the Christian in Psalm 119 is one that's full of trials. This Christian has gone through a great deal – and yet, in spite of everything he's suffered, he realized that he has a hope that the wicked lack. He has hope for deliverance:

**Psalm 119:153-154:** “Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.”

The wicked lack this hope:

**Psalm 119:155:** “Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes.”

When this Christian was cast down he turned to the Lord. He knew that even if he lost everything he was still blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He knew that he has everlasting life and will one day live again. When the wicked are cast down, though, they have no one to turn to who can save their soul. The false gods that the wicked serve can't save them in the day of trouble! Only the Lord can deliver them – but they've turned against the Lord.

## Shin

In the “Shin” section this Christian praises God for the great things that He's done:

**Psalm 119:164:** “Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments.”

It's not enough for him to praise God just once or twice. He's living a life of continuous praise! He recognizes all the blessings God has given him and he praises the Lord. His heart rejoices and he's at peace:

**Psalm 119:165:** “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

The wicked seek peace, but they can never find real peace because the world isn't able to give it. The peace that passes understanding only comes from God. Those who love the Word of God and walk in its light will find peace. However, those who abandon the Word and walk according to their own desires will find trouble and distress.

## Tau

In the “Tau” section we come to the end of the psalm. At the end of the journey this Christian continues to praise the Lord for all the things He's done:

**Psalm 119:171:** “My lips shall utter praise, when thou hast taught me thy statutes.”

But he does more than just praise the Lord. He also seeks to teach the Word to others. He's spreading the news of what God has said and done:

**Psalm 119:172:** "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness."

Interestingly, at the end of the psalm the Christian doesn't claim to have all the answers or be perfect. Instead he has a humble opinion of himself. He sees himself as a sinner who's in constant need of grace. He closes by asking God to be the good shepherd and take care of him:

**Psalm 119:176:** "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

This is a man who loves the Lord and His Word – and he realizes he needs the Lord. Since God is his strength he cries out to Him, because he knows that God loves him and watches over him.