

1. I have to admit, I have been nervous for a while about teaching this psalm. I knew there were 176 verses in this one psalm. I knew one of my favorite writers (Charles Spurgeon) wrote a 400-page commentary on this psalm. I remember asking God, "You want me to teach the psalms? What about Psalm 119? How am I going to get through that?" He reminded me He has gotten me through a lot of other difficult sections of the bible and He'll get me through this one too.
2. If I had to summarize this psalm in one thought it would be "Praise God for His word."
 - a) Obviously if that is all there is to this psalm, it wouldn't be 176 verses. It is surprisingly not repetitive even though all these verses are on a single topic. Finally, let me also say that this psalm does not encourage us to worship the bible itself. The more one studies this psalm, the more one realizes this is true.
3. Before we begin, here's a key point to remember: When this psalm was written, there was no New Testament, nor was the Old Testament finished being written. Therefore, when the writer of this psalm refers to the bible, most likely he is referring to the first five books of the bible.
4. I also need to mention that this psalm uses a number of words to describe the bible. Some study bibles come with charts that show what each of those words describing God's Word means. I'll discuss some of those terms in this lesson. What I simply want you to remember for now is that each of these terms has distinct meanings, but there is a lot of overlap to those terms.
5. Also be aware that this psalm does not "flow" like other psalms. Let me explain:
 - a) There are 22 different sections to this psalm. Each section has a purpose but they don't "flow" from one line or one section to the other. There is the common theme in the whole psalm about appreciating His word, but this 176-verse psalm is not a continuous story.
 - b) Speaking of "flow", it is time to talk about the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in that alphabet. As I said, this psalm has 22 sections, and each section corresponds with a different letter of that alphabet. A rough English translation would be, "Section #1 has eight verses and the first letter of the first word of each of those eight verses begins with the letter "a". The next eight verses all begin with a "b". Obviously the Hebrew alphabet is different, but it gives you an idea of how this psalm was organized.
 - i) OK John, I don't speak Hebrew, why should I know this? If nothing else, it helps us to appreciate the structure of this psalm and how it is organized. If the author can spend 176 verses essentially praising His word, and this psalm is inspired by God, we should learn how this long psalm does benefit our lives by learning it.
6. Speaking of the author let me comment about who wrote it: We don't know. Many suggest David. Some scholars suggest other famous bible figures. There are clues in this psalm that could point to particular people, but the truth is, we don't know for sure. This psalm has no title.
7. OK John, why is this psalm here? Remember that the last group of psalms was all about praising God. A logical question to ask is "What do we praise God for? What are the principals that God wants us to live by? In two words, it is "His word". A big purpose of this psalm is to get us to understand the importance of His word and why we should apply those principals to our lives.
 - a) Which of course is my lesson title: "Praising God for His Word"
 - i) I now have 176 verses and several lessons to explain that title.
 - b) The more I studied this psalm, the more I realized I couldn't cover it all in one lesson. I'm not going to write 400 pages like Charles Spurgeon, but at the same time, there is no way I can get cover this entire psalm in one of my lessons. Therefore, I ask that you relax, enjoy the ride and hopefully we will all learn a few new things about why we appreciate having God in our lives and why we should be grateful for having His word for us to study.
 - c) OK everyone, let's get our running shoes on and start Verse 1. ☺

8. Verse 1: Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. ² Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart.
- a) Let's start with "blessed". As I have stated in the previous few lessons, I don't think this has anything to do making money. The bible never says, "follow me (God) and I (God) will make you rich beyond your wildest dreams." To say that another way, God never says to us, "Follow me for all of the financial blessings one gets in this lifetime."
 - i) At the same time God does care for our lives, and if He cares for us, I do believe He will guide us down a path that will help us to meet our financial needs.
 - ii) OK, if blessing does not mean "stuff", what does it mean? It means we get to enjoy life far more if we learn to trust Him. But John, what if I want lots of stuff? If that is true, one's heart is not in the right place. There is nothing wrong with wanting to provide for one's self or one's family. What is wrong is the desire to have lots of stuff "just to have lots of stuff".
 - b) OK, John, if blessing does not mean for example money or fame, what does it mean? It means that we get the privilege of living a life to make a difference for Him. If God's word teaches us how He wants us to live, it would make sense that if we do what He asks, then He would bless our lives in that He gets us to trust in Him.
 - c) Let me explain this concept another way: I am convinced that the opposite of faith is to worry. When we lack the faith of how God will get us through a particular situation, we worry about how we are going to get through a situation. That is why I say worrying is the opposite of faith. God does not want us to worry, which is why He promises to bless our lives if and when we are willing to trust Him through our lives.
 - d) All of this leads me back to the first two verses. Verse 1 says that we are blessed if our ways are blameless. OK John I am not perfect and neither are you. How do we become blameless and never mess up? The verse is not saying we have to be perfect all the time as much as it is saying we have to trust God in all things. As a Christian I am blameless in that I trust Jesus has fully paid the price for all my sins. However, to walk blamelessly is to not only to trust in that fact, but also to trust God daily to guide our lives.
 - i) That is being blameless: To trust in God with every aspect of our lives.
 - e) The second part of Verse 1 says that in order to be blessed we have to "walk in the law of the Lord". That refers to trusting in the bible, and in this case the Old Testament laws".
 - i) John, you have beaten the point to death in the last few lessons (and the New Testament teaches) that we as Christians are not under the Old Testament law. If that is true, how and why as Christians "Walk in the law of the Lord?"
 - a) The answer is that God desires (not requires, but desires) that we spend time reading and studying the entire bible, and that does include those first five books and what they teach us. How we apply them as Christians requires us to think about them.
 - b) Also remember that not ever verse in the first five books of the bible is a set of instructions saying, "do this or don't do that". While there is a lot of that, the first five books of the bible are much more than a set of rules.
 - ii) Does this mean I need to go buy commentaries on those books? As much as I love bible commentaries, that is not the point. The point is if we trust and pray that God is guiding our lives, He will guide us to understand how to apply the laws and principals taught in those five books as well as the rest of the bible.
 - f) All of this leads to Verse 2. That verse is essentially a repeat of Verse 1.
 - i) Remember that when the bible was written, they couldn't put word in italics or bold fonts or different colors. Therefore, ideas were often repeated as a way to emphasize their importance. The main point of Verse 2 is to remind us to keep God's laws "as much as possible". Again keeping them is not a requirement for salvation, but a guide on how God desires that we live our lives.

- g) Verse 2 also mentions "all of one's heart". That phrase requires an explanation:
 - i) There is an old expression in Christianity that one can miss God "by eighteen inches". The idea is that one gets the word of God in their head, but not their heart." The distance between one's head and one's heart is about eighteen inches.
 - a) The point is that we can read God's word and understand it's meaning. However, to apply it to our lives, we should spend time thinking about how it should apply to our lives.
 - b) In other words bible study should be more than a mental exercise of reading. It should include time contemplating it's meaning.
 - ii) Next I need to explain "all of one's heart". The idea is in effect that God desires that every aspect of our lives be under His control. If we trust God with every aspect of our lives, then we need to think about different aspects of our lives and what still needs to be given over to His control.
 - iii) While you are thinking about aspects of your lives, I'll sneak over to Verse 3. ☺
- 9. Verse 3: They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.
 - a) This verse is saying that when we are focusing on God, we do nothing wrong. The first thing one might think about this verse is "that is impossible". We all make mistakes. How can the text possibly say we do nothing wrong even when we trust in Him?
 - i) To understand this verse, the idea is not that we are perfect. The idea is that when we are focusing on Him, we are less likely to turn from Him.
 - b) Jesus taught we couldn't serve two masters. (Matthew 6:24 or Luke 16:13). The idea is in effect that at any one moment we can choose to do God's will or choose to do our own will, but we can't do both at the same time. That principal is in play in this verse. If we are choosing to do God's will, then by definition, we can't be doing anything that displeases Him. Studying His word teaches us what His will includes.
- 10. Verse 4: You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed.
 - a) OK, first question, what is the difference between God's laws and His "precepts"? While the terms are similar and almost interchangeable, they are different words.
 - i) Think of God's laws as His instructions for our lives.
 - ii) Think of His "precepts" as what He has called us to do.
 - iii) Examples from God's "law" would include not stealing and hurting other people. A "precept" might be a biblical way of applying those rules to our lives. The bible is full of examples and illustrations of how to apply all of His laws to our lives, and those examples and illustrations are His "precepts".
 - b) The point here is that we should not pick and choose parts of the bible to obey, but follow all of what it teaches. For the Christian, one has to study the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. The key point is that we obey God not to gain points with Him but out of our love for what He did for us. That is why it should be our desire to please Him.
- 11. Verse 5: Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!
 - a) In verse 5, we get another synonym for God's word: "decrees". This is a different word from both laws and precepts. The idea of "decrees" (Hebrew is "shuggim") is that these are the rules that God has laid down for us.
 - i) If you think these words overlap in meaning, so do I. I tried memorizing each of these terms, but I find that the more I read them, the more I get them mixed up
 - ii) Here is what all of us do need to remember: God desires that we obey what He has written down for us to study. This gets back to my "head versus heart" point. God does not just want us to read our bible and think, "That's a good point and move on." He wants us to read our bible and think, "I need to apply that point to my life because that is the right way for me to live."
 - b) I think the point is that God has written these laws not for His sake, but for ours. If these rules are the best way for us to live, then we should obey them and do as instructed.

12. Verse 6: Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands.
- a) So what is the shame being discussed in this verse? The idea here is that if we fail to put our trust in God for any particular aspect of our lives, it could and usually does lead to shame for what we have done that displeases Him. Let me explain:
 - i) Suppose we decide that we don't need God's help in a particular aspect of our lives. We then mess up in that aspect. We have been put to shame when we realize, "God was right and I was wrong as to how I handled that situation". That confession of "God is right" is what He desires of us when we do turn from sin. It doesn't mean we will be perfect in the future. It just means we realize God was right and we were wrong and we desire to turn from our mistakes due to our trust that His way of living is right.
 - b) This leads back to this verse. The point here is we won't feel that shame of not doing God's will when we spend time considering His commands for our lives.
 - c) Let me try this one more way: I believe it is essential for the Christian to spend time daily in His word. By spending time focusing on Him, it "recharges our spiritual battery" and helps us make decisions through our day that are pleasing to Him. God does not expect us to spend all day in His word or in prayer. However, I have discovered that when we give God the "first" or best of our day, He honors that commitment and blesses our lives.
 - i) If you are a morning person, give God the first part of that morning. If you are a night person, give God the first part of that evening. The point is if we give God the best of our time, He honors that and blesses the rest of our day and night.
 - ii) When I say, "give", I just mean to carve out some time to honor Him as God. Use that time to study His word and include some prayer. I have been amazed how my life has been blessed when I dedicate regular daily time to Him.
 - iii) That little speech about spending time daily with God, leads perfectly to Verse 7.
13. Verse 7: I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws.
- a) Let me paraphrase this verse: As I learn more about You today, let me praise You for teaching me how I should properly live. As I learn Your word and learn what it is I have done wrong in the past, thank You for not punishing me for disobedience and now that I know better, help me to live as I should.
 - i) An illustration would be good here: Suppose we are reading our bible and all of sudden the text hits us in a way to make us realize we need to change a particular aspect of our lives. Those types of moments come regularly as one reads the bible. In other words, the bible can be very convicting to our lives.
 - ii) So does that mean once we understand a principle we will never sin that way again? Of course not. The point is once we have insight on a particular point, we ask God to lead us to be obedient to that particular point.
 - b) All of this convicting does lead me back to Verse 7. The point is when we do learn how God wants us to act in a certain situation, we praise Him in effect by saying, "I now understand what it is You want me to do in this situation." (If you haven't had a moment like that in a while, trust me, if you study your bible daily, such moments will come.)
14. Verse 8: I will obey your decrees; do not utterly forsake me.
- a) I like the New Living Translation of this verse that says, "I will obey your decrees. Please don't give up on me!" That paraphrases this verse well. We can read our bible and realize how much we have messed up in the past and then ask God "don't give up on me. I know I have messed up badly, but it is my desire to follow You, despite my mistakes."
 - b) The good news is that God never forsakes us no matter how bad we mess up. Jesus taught that the only (big emphasis on only) unforgivable sin is a lifetime denial that Jesus is God. (My paraphrase of Matthew 12:31.) We may have to pay to society for our crimes, but God is willing to forgive all of our sins if we turn our lives over to Him. The idea is when (not if, but when) we mess up, we can always turn back to God to live as He desires.

15. Before we move on to the next group of eight verses, it is probably important to pause for a moment and discuss why it is we should obey God's laws. What I mean by that is when this psalm was written the focus was on the first five books of the Old Testament.
 - a) In other words, one could think, "I as a Christian am not subject to God's laws, but His grace. Why should I study the laws of the Old Testament if I am not subject to them?"
 - i) This leads to the false view that "God loves me no matter what, and I am trusting in Jesus' payment for my sins, therefore why should I worry about my behavior."
 - ii) Remember that God's love for us is in effect an incomplete truth. Yes He loves us and desires the best for our lives, but at the same time, if we truly do love God, then we would want to be obedient to Him.
 - iii) I believe it was Billy Graham who once said, if we just "breathe in" God, we can't help "breathing out" obedience to Him. The point is trust in God and obedience to Him are both interconnected concepts with each other.
 - b) So John, does this mean we are subject to God's laws or not? I'm confused. Let me put it this way: We are saved solely by our trust in Jesus as God. However, if we do believe Jesus is God, we should want to do something about that belief. Therefore, we study the entire bible to learn how it is God wants us to live. Yes the laws of the Old Testament have to be studied in the light of the New Testament, but all of it should be studied.
16. With that deep thought running through our head, it is time for Verse 9. Remember that Psalm 119 is written in groups of eight verses. We are now starting the second set of "eights" where the first letter of each verse in the original Hebrew is the second letter of that alphabet.
 - a) While all 22 sets of 8 verse (this one whole psalm), have a single theme of appreciating His word; each set of 8 verses is designed to teach a separate lesson.
 - i) The first eight verses is a reminder that our lives will be better off if we do obey His commandments (again, as I just taught on this page, understanding them in light of how a Christian needs to see the law as I covered so far on this page.)
 - b) With that said, we have a long way to go and it's time for the second set of eight verses.
17. Verse 9: How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.
 - a) To start this verse, understand that both "young man" and "young woman" apply here.
 - b) It might help to clear up a misconception that many of us may have about life. There is a bad bit of philosophy that in effect says, "Go out and have fun now that we are young and when you get older then one can focus on all of this religious stuff".
 - i) For starters, one never knows how long one has in life. There is no guarantee that we will live to a specific age in life.
 - ii) Next, one has to understand what a waste of a life it is to live for anything other than God. I'm not saying we can't enjoy our lives. I am saying that if one realizes at any age that living for God is the greatest purpose in life, then we can enjoy life far more than if we turn from Him for any length of time.
 - iii) I can just hear someone say, "Well you are no fun if you are so serious about God all the time." God did create us with a sense of humor so I don't believe we do have to be serious all the time. At the same time, doing any sort of activity at any age that is displeasing to Him never turns out to be a good thing.
 - iv) As I like to say, God loves us too much to leave us alone. One way to tell that we are one of His is we can't get away with "anything" in life over the long term.
 - c) This leads me back to Verse 9. The way God wants us to live at any age, requires us to live according to what God's word teaches us about life. It is never a matter of waiting until a certain age in life before we start learning our bible, but to always start now. As I said, one never knows when one's time is up. I promise You that one will enjoy life and have far more fun learning to obey Him "now" as opposed to waiting for some future unknown day when we think we will change. To say it another day, if we won't live for Him now, what makes us think we can do it on some unknown future day?

18. Verse 10: I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands.
 - a) To paraphrase this verse, "God it is my desire that every aspect of my life be pleasing to You. In order for me to live that way, let me not stray from what You want to teach me."
 - b) In the last verse, I gave a lecture that in order to live for God, we have to start now as opposed to some future unknown date when we think we will change our lifestyle.
 - i) Now in Verse 10 it says we will seek God with all of heart.
 - ii) The connection of the two verses is that if we realize the right way to live is to live for God now, then we should give it "all we got" now.
 - iii) In order to "give it all we've got now", that means we do spend that daily time thinking about God and spending time in His word.
 - c) This leads me to the point about this second set of eight verses: The focus is on our desire to avoiding sin in our lives. That is why we stick to His word:
 - i) Avoiding sin is never be done by trying harder. Avoiding sin is about letting God work through our lives to change us to be the type of person He wants us to be.
 - ii) That is why there is such a heavy emphasis in this psalm and in these eight verses on the importance of studying His word. Learning what God desires of our lives is how He works through our lives to change us to be the way He wants us to be.
 - iii) In other words, why can't we just ask God, "Make me completely trust You now and never sin again?" The answer is we can't handle all of that change in one moment in time. To grow in our trust in Him does require time. As we study what He wants us to learn, we grow in our obedience to Him.
19. Verse 11: I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
 - a) All of this talk about studying God's word in order not to sin leads us perfectly to Verse 11. This verse is reminding us again to "hide His word in our heart" so we don't sin.
 - b) The idea of "hiding His word", simply means that if we spend time thinking about its meaning and thinking about how it applies to our lives does make us better people.
 - c) Let me try this another way: Just repeating a bible verse over and over again, may get us to memorize that verse, but until we pause and contemplate its meaning, it is still just a "bunch of words". The point of this verse is simply that in order not to sin, it requires regular time thinking about what God's word means.
20. Verse 12: Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees.
 - a) OK, how does God teach us His "decrees" (think bible based rules and principals)?
 - i) Is there a magic set of words we have to say in order to get Him to do teach us? No. The point is God gave us a brain and an ability to think and therefore, all we have to do is take the time to think about verses.
 - b) Let me pause here and state one of my favorite verses from the book of Isaiah. It is "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." (Isaiah 28:10, NKJV) The point is God does not teach us the whole bible or a whole book at one sitting. We can't mentally handle all that information.
 - i) Instead God teaches us a little at a time, because that is all we can handle at one given moment in time. Sometimes when we read our bible, we can read several chapters at one sitting. Sometimes God just wants us to focus on a few verses. The point is God teaches us His word at His pace on His timing. We still have to make the effort to learn, but then it sinks in "here a little there a little".
 - ii) In short, don't panic if one is confused on a passage. Just agree to think about it and God will help us to understand it His way and on His timing.
 - c) OK, enough of my cute sayings. ☺ Back to the text.
21. Verse 13: With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.
 - a) Translation: I will speak what I have learned. Or "I will pass on what I have learned.
 - b) The idea is that it is not enough to just learn our bible, but we need to put what it says into practice. That is all I want to say about that verse, so I can move on to the next one

22. Verse 14: I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.
- Let's be honest, no matter how much or how little money one has, if all of sudden, one received a great fortune in wealth, one would be happy for that moment.
 - The point of this verse is that God wants us to be as happy studying His word, as we would be if we just found out we had a lot of stuff.
 - So John, are you saying we should jump up and down in excitement every time we open our bible? After awhile even that would get boring. I think the point is that we should appreciate God's word more than appreciating any great thing we get in this lifetime.
 - To say it another way, to obey what God commands us to do, deserves as much joy in our life than we might express if we all of a sudden had great material riches. It is about realizing the great blessing we have in that we can study and obey what God has given us through His word. Which leads us well to the next verse.
23. Verse 15: I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.
- If we delight that much in God's word, then we should spend daily time thinking about how His word should apply to our lives. That is what this verse is teaching us.
24. Verse 16: I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.
- If we appreciate God's word more than riches, then we should not only read it, but "delight" (have joy of knowing we are doing the right thing) by studying it. Again, this does not mean we should be spending all day in God's word. He desires that we as believers go out in the world and make a difference for Him. The secret of making that difference does depend on giving the "best of our day" to Him so that He does then give us the strength to make a difference for Him in this world. Therefore, if it is our desire to please Him, it is necessary that we don't neglect His word and enjoy studying it.
 - OK, John, what if I have a bad day or year and I haven't been studying the word like I should? First, welcome to the club. The cliché answer is we can't change the past, but we should always work to make our life better for our future.
 - Next, God understands there are times of emergencies. Still, that should not be an excuse to regularly ignore His word.
 - OK, now that we know we should delight in His word, it's time to move on. We now have two sets of eight verses done and only 20 more sets to go. (Yes, we are going to take more than one lesson to get through this psalm.)
25. Verse 17: Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word.
- The idea here is that the writer is asking God to bless his (the writer's) life so that he would be obedient to God's word.
 - The King James Version uses the word "bountifully" instead of "do good". The idea is that we should want God to bless us a lot. So does that mean we want God to give us a lot of money so we have time to study His word? Not exactly. The idea is more along the lines of asking God to use our lives to make a difference for Him so we do have that chance to be obedient to Him.
 - Think of it this way: Being blessed by God and doing His will are intertwined or go hand in hand as I like to say. So what comes first, obedience or blessing? The answer is that these two concepts are so intertwined they work together. In effect, the purpose of this verse is to remind us that it is acceptable to ask God to bless our lives so we can make that difference for Him.
26. Verse 18: Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.
- My translation: "Dear God, help me to understand what Your word is saying to me."
 - As I was once taught, we should always read our bible prayerfully and not just intellectually. I don't believe there are magic words to pray before reading, but I do believe we should desire the Holy Spirit to guide us as we read His word.
 - The point of this verse is that we shouldn't just read our bibles, but we should ask God to guide us so that we can understand how it should apply to our lives.

27. Verse 19: I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.
- a) Jesus taught that our home as Christians is in heaven, not on earth. What that means is that if we belong to Him, we should no longer be interested in things of "this world".
 - i) OK John, does that mean I can't have hobbies or interests? Of course not. It just means that whatever or wherever God calls us to be or whatever our activity of the moment, we are interested in living in a way that is pleasing to God.
 - b) OK John, I sort of get that that by now. What does the idea of "being a stranger" have to do with the idea of God hiding His commandments from us? Glad you asked. ☺
 - i) I am reminded of something that was written in one of the first bibles I owned:
 - a) "Sin will keep you from this book and this book will keep you from sin".
 - b) That saying is the idea behind this verse. If we are spending most of our time focusing on things other than God, then we will lose interest in Him.
 - c) The point being in order for us to learn what God wants from us, that we have to make the conscious effort to seek Him in the first place.
28. Verse 20: My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.
- a) How does one tell if one is saved? A good clue is that we can't stand not being close to God. If it is one's desire to please Him with one's life (without going into the usual lecture about accepting Jesus' payment for our sins), then one desires His word. To say it another way, if it is our desire to please God, then it should be our desire to study His word.
 - b) Ok, John, what if I don't have that desire to study His word at this moment? Does that mean I am not saved? No it doesn't. I am not saying we have to spend all day in God's word, but at the same time one has to question one's salvation if one has no desire to learn what God wants to teach us in our lives. There is no better way to learn what He desires of us then to spend regular time studying His word (Old and New Testament.)
 - c) I am convinced that one of the secrets to living a good life is discipline. That means we don't spend all day just watching television as an example, but we take the trouble to discipline our lives to do what God desires us to do. One of those disciplines is about spending regular time studying His word. That is the idea of this verse.
29. Verse 21: You rebuke the arrogant, who are cursed and who stray from your commands.
- a) Let's face it. Most people don't spend time reading the bible. Whether we realize it or not, such people are arrogant in that they are more interested in pleasing themselves than they are in pleasing God. That is why most people avoid His word.
 - b) We are lucky to be living in the era of information. That means most people have access to tremendous amounts of information literally at their fingertips. What most people fail to realize is with that knowledge comes increased responsibility. My point is God not only holds us accountable for what we do know, but what we should know because such information is readily available to us.
 - i) My point is, if we have access to the internet and a computer screen, we have no excuse in our day and age to say it was anything other than our fault for straying against God's commandments.
 - c) But John, this psalm was written roughly 3,000 years ago. How can God call people who didn't and don't have access to His word "arrogant"? Another good question.
 - i) The answer comes back to the principal that God holds us accountable for the information we do have or do have access to. For those with limited access to God, I am pretty sure He will judge such people based on what they do know.
 - ii) The point for you and me is in effect that we have no excuse. Just as those who refuse to seek God in the first place are condemned, so are we Christians missing out on God's blessing for our lives if we refuse to take the regular time to seek Him in the first place.

- iii) In summary, make the time to seek His commandments for our lives and we will be blessed by Him as those two concepts are intertwined with each other.

30. Verse 22: Remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes.
- a) One excuse for not reading our bible is that others can scorn us. There is a classical line of the non-Christian saying to the Christian, "How many times are you going to read that thing? There are other things to do in life you know."
 - b) The point being is that if we have the discipline to spend time daily with God, we can receive scorn and contempt from others who don't make that same effort.
 - c) The mistake is to think that God loves us more because we read our bible. The truth is simply that God will bless us more if it is our desire to serve Him. That blessing means He will draw us closer to Him and teach us what He desires of our life through the bible.
 - d) So if God loves all people, how do we deal with scorn and contempt?
 - i) I am reminded of the biblical line to "flee temptation". (See 2nd Timothy 2:22).
 - ii) The idea is that if we are facing scorn for following God, run away if we can.
 - iii) What if a family member or a co-worker is giving us scorn? Then ask yourself is it better to listen to "them" or to God.
31. Verse 23: Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.
- a) If you haven't figured it out by now, this third section of Psalm 119 deals with false accusations and excuses not to read God's word. Here in Verse 23, we are dealing with rulers slandering the writer of the psalm.
 - b) This verse has lead to speculation over who was the author. The question is, which famous biblical character lived among the leaders and was slandered for his love of God's word? Since we don't know, it is speculation and we don't know the answer.
 - c) The point of this verse for you and me is that our leaders or famous people may put down our belief in God and our trust in bible, but that shouldn't stop us from reading it.
 - d) Know that criticism of the bible is as old as the bible itself. Charles Spurgeon is famous for the expression that goes, "The bible is like a lion. You don't have to defend it, you just let it loose and it defends itself." My point being that we should just stick to what God calls us to do (regularly read His word) and don't worry about what others in power think of the time and trouble we take to study His word and how it applies to us.
32. Verse 24: Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.
- a) Think of this verse as a response to the rest of this "eight verse section".
 - i) In this section, it talked about others who scorn us for reading our bible. It talked about excuses we could make for not studying God's word.
 - ii) This section ends in effect with a statement that says, "Despite all of those excuses, I will take the trouble to regularly study Your word."
 - b) Yes I'm zipping quickly through a lot of verses, but there are a lot to cover. Let's move on.
33. Verse 25: I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word.
- a) We now start the fourth section of this psalm. Some scholars argue that whoever wrote this psalm, wrote it over a long period of their lives and then put it together. That view takes into account this fourth section, as whatever is happening here is not good.
 - i) My point is beginning in this verse, the writer is saying he is close to death. I don't know about you, but I never think I am close to death unless I am in "big trouble".
 - ii) One has to remember that in Hebrew poetry, "dust" is symbolic death. The idea is when we die, our bodies return to the ground. Our physical bodies are made up of the same elements that are found in the dust of the earth.
 - b) OK John, now that you've gotten us all depressed, ☺ what does this verse mean?
 - i) The point of this verse is that when we are feeling really down, no matter what the reason, we can look to God's word to revive us.
 - ii) The idea is that spending time reading God's word, gives us good perspective about our lives and reminds us of what is important. I have found that reading

my bible can literally revive my attitude in difficult moments and I suspect that is what the psalm writer is describing in this verse.

34. Verse 26: I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees.
- a) To paraphrase this verse, the psalmist told God all that he (the writer) was dealing with. God answered the writer's requests. Let me explain.
 - i) I believe God knows all things. If that is true, why bother to tell Him what is bothering us? Think of raising a child. We may already know what our children have done in a situation, but we know it helps them to grow if they explain it to us. When the child explains what they learn, is evidence that they get it.
 - ii) My point is when we lay out our situation to God, it is not for His sake, but it is for our sake. It helps us to put our situation in perspective of God's plan for our lives.
 - b) OK John, Verse 26 says God answered when the writer laid out his situation to Him. How does God actually answer our prayers? I've never heard Him speak verbally to me.
 - i) The idea is when we commit our lives to regular prayer and time in His word, and do lay out our situations to God it is then amazing how things just work out once we lay out (explain) our situations to Him. It doesn't mean our problems instantly go away. It means that talking to Him and studying His word regularly, gives us the perspective in life to get through our situation.
 - ii) I once heard the concept of God guiding us is like being stuck in a fast flowing river and God provides a rope to pull us to shore. I believe when we commit our lives to regularly pray to Him and study that word, in God's own way and timing that "rope" is always there to lead us down the path He wants for our lives.
 - iii) That is the idea of this verse. We lay out our issues to God and He guides us through those issues. That is the decrees God teaches us through His word that give us the wisdom to find that "rope" that leads us where He wants to lead us.
 - c) OK John, you've been rambling through this whole lesson about trusting God and following what His word says to us. What does He specifically want me to do?
 - i) For example, if I am stuck with a particular problem, how does God want me to solve that problem? Do I just open the bible to a random page and do what is said on that page? Never. To use a classic example, we may read where Judas hung himself out of guilt (See Acts 1:18) for betraying Jesus. That does not mean God wants us to kill ourselves over some bad decision we have made in our life.
 - ii) Now that you have explained what not to do, what do we do? First of all, we tell God, specifically and in detail what it is on our minds. That doesn't mean He will solve our issue immediately. It just means we have laid out our issues before Him.
 - iii) We then read, just where we left off the last time we are in our bible. If you have never studied one's bible, I usually recommend simply starting with the New Testament and reading straight through. My personal method is I keep three bookmarks: One in the Old Testament, one in the New Testament and one for Psalms and Proverbs and every day I move the bookmarks a little.
 - a) My point is as we daily commit to regularly reading through His word, it is amazing how the principals it teaches does give us the perspective to see our current problems and issues in light of God's word.
 - b) Often we can read our bibles and still not know what decision to make. I usually find it is best to wait until God makes it obvious what He wants us to do. Remember that God can say, "Yes, no or wait". The best answer is sometimes to wait until He is ready to lead us.
 - c) If we are in a situation where we have to decide now, we just make the best decision possible given the facts we have about that situation. If it turns out to be the wrong decision, I find that God will guide us through that

wrong decision. Sometimes the way He wants us to learn is by learning through our mistakes. The point is sometimes we just have to move on, make the best decision possible and trust that He is guiding us.

35. Verse 27: Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. ²⁸ My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.
- a) I haven't combined two verses in a while, but I see these two going together.
 - i) In Verse 27, the writer is saying, "Dear God help me to understand what the bible is teaching me and then I will meditate on what I just read."
 - ii) In Verse 28, the writer is saying, "I am in pain, may the bible strengthen me."
 - b) All of this reminds me of what this fourth section of Psalm 119 is all about: Giving God our issues when things are not going well. Reading our bible is more than just a mental exercise in reading, it is about literally asking God to help us understand how to apply it to our lives and help us to see our current situation in light of His word.
 - i) My point is just reading this psalm or any psalm is not effective unless it is our desire for God to help us understand what it is saying. I am amazed how many people I have met in my life who have stated that they never really appreciated God's word, until they have actually committed their lives to serving Him.
 - c) This leads me back to describing rough times. God never promises to end our problems overnight. What He does do is promise to guide us through those times. Reading our bible and laying our problems to Him becomes that "rope" I described of God guiding us.
36. Verse 29: Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.
- a) The idea of "deceitful ways" is also translated "lying to oneself". What does that mean?
 - i) When one is in trouble like the psalmist here, it is easy to think that one should, "I should skip our time with God for awhile to go deal with our problems."
37. Verse 30: I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. ³¹ I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame.
- a) Let me paraphrase these verses: That is, "I have made the commitment to be guided by God's word. I need Your help to stick to that commitment." Help me not to be ashamed to live the way You desire me to live. So how do we get ashamed by a bible study?
 - i) We can be convicted by something we read in our bible and be afraid to admit that we need to change some aspect of our lives. Getting past the shame of our mistakes is often the hardest part of dealing with an issue.
 - ii) What we have to remember is that God loves us too much to leave us in that state of shame. God is saying to us, "If it is Your desire to follow me, let go of your shame, and I (God) will guide us to what I desire right now."
38. Verse 32: I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.
- a) Notice the word "run". It should be our desire to follow God to where we mentally want to run to be with Him. The idea is that we will not just think about what God desires us to do, but we give it all we've got to actually practice what it teaches.
 - b) This does not mean we have to immediately stop what we are doing and go read our bibles for the next hour. The point is that if we do make that commitment to be "near" God daily by spending time daily in His word, that is the "running" that God desires.
 - c) OK, and how has that set our heart free? That is easy. That means we don't have to worry about the results of our lives, because the results are now His problem, not ours.
39. Verse 33: Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end.
- a) After telling us in the last verse to "run" to follow all of God's commandments, this next verse is a similar type of request that we follow God's word to the end of our lives.
 - b) So does this mean if we fail to read our bible a week from Tuesday, God will strike us dead? Not exactly. The idea is that if it is our desire to follow God, it should be our desire to stick to that commitment as long as we live.

- c) I have always held the view that there is no retirement from being a Christian. We may retire from our career, but never from serving Him. I always figured that if I ever get to a point where my strength is gone, I would still pray for others around me. The point of this verse is that we "stick to it" until God says our time is up.
- 40. Verse 34: Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.
 - a) This verse is saying effect, "Dear God, help me to understand what it is You want from my life and I will obey your word as much as I can." What this verse is leading up to is the danger of turning away from His word, which is the topic of this eight-verse section.
 - b) It may help to explain that the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet when used to start a word makes that word a command to obey. Remember that all the verses in this fifth section start with the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet in the original language.
 - i) OK, John, what does that mean? Think of this fifth section as a bunch of commands for us to follow. Even in the English, that tone comes through.
 - ii) The command here in this verse is for God to lead us and we are to follow.
 - iii) It is that reminder that it always begins "with God", and our effort follows.
- 41. Verse 35: Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight.
 - a) "Help me to live as Your word guides me and I will delight (have joy) in obedience.
 - b) The command here is for God to guide us, and we will have joy as He does so.
- 42. Verse 36: Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. ³⁷ Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.
 - a) In these two verses, we get to the underlying purpose of this fifth section: It is the reminder to not overly focus our lives on things that are essentially a waste of time.
 - b) The most precious thing we have in our lives is time. Each one of us has an unknown amount of time to live this life. The idea is to use our time wisely for Him.
 - c) That doesn't mean we can't have down time or use time to earn a living. It means we put our time in perspective of the eternal. It takes discipline to study God's word daily.
 - d) Verse 37 emphasizes the eyes as a source of "worthless things". Think about how much time we waste looking at things that are essentially a waste of our time. Again, I am not talking about never having downtime or relaxing. I am just saying we need to use our time wisely and consider what ultimately makes a difference for Him with our time.
- 43. Verse 38: Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. ³⁹ Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. ⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.
 - a) Think of the word "reassurance": Sometimes we want God to reassure us that we are not wasting our time following Him. I have found that as I spend time in His word, in God's own way, He does reassure me that I am going down the right path in life. Verse 39 then emphasizes "disgrace". The idea is that as we become convicted by His word, He takes away our disgrace by teaching us the right way to live with our lives. Verse 40 is then that reminder that following God and sticking close to Him is the right way for us to live.
 - b) The point of these verses is that if we are willing to make that commitment to follow Him, He does reassure us that it is not a waste of time to worship God and study His word.
- 44. OK, 40 verses down and we still have 136 verses to go in this psalm. Some scholars call Psalm 119 the "Mount Everest" of the bible, as it is longest chapter in the whole bible.
 - a) So how does one climb Mount Everest? A little at a time. I don't know at this point how long it will take us to get through the rest of the psalm. What I did want to accomplish in this lesson is get us in "running shape" to go through the psalm.
 - b) At this point, all I ask is that you think about what God's word should mean to our lives and commit ourselves to making His word part of our daily lives.
 - c) If one makes the effort to climb a big mountain, eventually one does make it, "weather permitting". That will be the case of us getting through the biggest mountain in the bible.

45. Let' pray: Father, help us to appreciate not only what Your word teaches us, but how You use it to guide our lives. Thank You for the giving us privilege of understanding what You desire of our lives through Your word. Help us to have the discipline to make that part of our daily lives. Finally, help us to use our time wisely to make a difference for You in this lifetime. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.