

1. We now begin the second of what I believe will be four lessons on this one psalm. For those who don't know, Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the bible as well as the longest chapter in the bible.
 - a) Let me state why I believe one should study this psalm: It is about understanding God's word in terms of our relationship between God and ourselves. The psalmist needed 176 verses to explain that relationship and I need 4 lessons to explain what he meant by that.
 - b) The good news is after this psalm, it is downhill for the rest of the book. If you've made it with me this far through the psalms, making it to the end to the end is a much easier task.
2. Taking on large projects like this psalm, leads me to my lesson title: "Reaching the mountaintop". Psalm 119 is called the Mount Everest of the bible given its large size and scope. In this lesson, we will make it to the halfway point of the psalm. If this psalm journey is like going up and down a mountain, then the halfway point would be the mountain top. Thus, the lesson title.
 - a) So, why should we climb this mountain? What does God want us to learn from this lesson and this psalm? It is about appreciating how our life benefits from regularly daily studying His Word. Think of it this way: I have argued that this fifth book of the psalms is like the fifth book of the bible (Deuteronomy), which is about how to live the life that God desires of us. A summary of what it is God desires, is in effect written in His word. That is why we focus on it in this lesson as well as the other three lessons on this psalm.
3. OK enough of the mountain analogies. ☺ Let me talk a little more about this psalm itself: Of the 176 verses in this psalm almost all of them are direct praises to God for His word. This psalm is not repetitive even though such a long psalm focuses on that theme. Remember when this psalm was written, the Old Testament was not even complete. The references in this psalm to God's word were mainly concerning the first five books of the Old Testament.
 - a) Before we begin, also remember this psalm is organized in groups of eight verses. Each verse in each group begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This psalm has 22 sections of 8-verses. Each group corresponds with one of the 22 letters of that alphabet. One does not have to know Hebrew to study this psalm. Just know that the psalm is organized based on that alphabet structure.
 - b) As I discuss these verses, remember that each group of eight-verses has its own theme. The whole psalm is about getting us to appreciate God's word. Technically, each group of eight verses has a separate theme that all tie together to get us to appreciate the bible. I'll explain a little about each theme as I come to the first verse of each of those sections.
 - c) OK time put our hiking boots back on, as we are continuing our study through Psalm 119.
4. Psalm 119, Verse 41: May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise;⁴² then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word.
 - a) OK since we are starting another group of eight verses here, what is this group about? It is about having the boldness to speak to others about God because of our trust in Him. This will become obvious as we go through this section of the psalm.
 - b) Remember again that each verse in each group begin with the same Hebrew alphabet letter. This group beginning in Verse 41 is based on the Hebrew letter pronounced "waw". What is unusual about this alphabet letter is that it is rarely used to start a sentence. This letter of the alphabet is usually used as a "connector". Let me explain:
 - i) It would be kind of like reading in English with every sentence beginning with an "and" or an "or". In other words we are breaking grammatically rules in order to use this letter of the Hebrew alphabet as it is used in these verses.
 - ii) OK John, that is interesting if we happen to speak Hebrew. How is this relevant to us who don't speak it? It reminds us that every sentence in this group is connected to each other, the same way this letter is used to connect thoughts.

- iii) And what is the thought being connected? (Did you like how I started this sentence with an "and" to fit this theme? ☺) The idea is that our trust in Him begins with His mercy. I'll explain why that is significant as we go through this eight-verse section of the psalm.
 - c) With that said, let's look at the first phrase of Verse 41: "May your unfailing love come to me". The words "unfailing love" are translated "mercy" in other English translations. The point here is that our relationship with God begins with Him, not with us. It is like the old adage that God loves us before we ever realized that we have loved Him.
 - i) So if God always loved us, why should we pray for His love to come to us? To understand, we have to see this phrase in context of the rest of these two verses.
 - a) Let me give an example: There are always going to be times of doubt of our trust in God. We can be shy or embarrassed when we are around people who don't trust Him like we do. Therefore we ask for mercy when we don't do what God desires for that moment for our lives.
 - d) This leads us to the rest of Verse 41. It is about trusting in God's salvation.
 - i) Remember that salvation is more than when we first trusted in Jesus. It is about our continuous and daily trust in God. That trust is not based on our efforts, but based on our trust in His grace, mercy and His continual forgiveness of our sins.
 - ii) So John, if we are trusting in His mercy, why should we try to avoid sin in the first place? If we love God, it should be our desire to please Him. I'm not saying we have to be perfect, but that is no excuse to ignore Him in the first place.
 - e) This leads directly to Verse 42. This verse is about giving an answer to someone who is taunting us for our trust in God. Let me explain further:
 - i) If we are going to respond to someone who doesn't share in our faith in God, we have to have that faith in the first place in order to respond to that taunting.
 - a) We should develop some knowledge of His word in order to grow in our trust in Him. Knowledge of the bible is not necessary for salvation, but the more we know our bible, the better we can deal with our critics.
 - ii) The point is Verse 42 is about our reaction to others over our trust in God. This verse is not saying we have to be a bible expert in order to be a good Christian. However, if we do care about pleasing God, then at the same time we should learn to develop the courage to stand up for what we believe in. By growing in our trust in God, we naturally grow in our ability to take a stand for Jesus.
5. Verse 43: Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.
- a) It may help to remember who is talking to whom in this verse: The psalmist is speaking to God. The psalmist is asking God to always make His word near to the psalmist. That meant that copies of God's word always be available for Him to study.
 - i) In other words it is saying to us, if we love studying God's word, may He help us to stick to that commitment and have His word available to us to study.
 - b) OK John, if this verse is about continuing to study His word, why does it say "my mouth" as opposed to my head or my heart? The idea is to not just learn His word, but to be able to teach (speak) it to others. To speak God's word to others is proof that His word is in us.
6. Verse 44: I will always obey your law, for ever and ever.
- a) Is this verse saying that the psalmist will never fail to obey God's laws forever? No, but it is saying it is the intent or desire of the psalmist to always be loyal to Him.
 - b) Does it mean I have to study God's laws daily? I do believe Christians should develop the daily habit of spending time thinking about His word. As an example, I recently started a program to literally bribe my two daughters to develop a devotional time in the hopes that it turns into a lifelong habit.
 - i) Can we have bad days where we miss out on studying our bible? Of course. Just remember that the time we miss with God is our loss, not His.

- c) Let me discuss the issue of Christians and God's laws. While I believe Christians are not subject to God's laws for salvation, I also believe we can learn a lot from those laws in terms of how to best live our lives. The idea is not about drawing closer to God from obeying those laws, but learning to live a life that is the best way for us to live. Obviously the law needs to be read in the light of the New Testament. For example, we don't offer animals for our sins, as Jesus was our once and for-all sacrifice. My point is Christians can learn from the Old Testament laws even though we are not subject to them.
 - d) The point of this verse is that God desires we develop good habits of studying His word as to develop a lifetime habit of trusting in Him. This is about "finishing well" in life.
 - i) Know that the bible is full of stories of people who didn't finish well in life. Part of the reason they didn't finish well is they turned away from what God desired of their lives. The point of this verse is to continually seeking God does cause us to "finish well", which is what the psalmist desires of himself and of us the reader.
7. Verse 45: I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.
- a) At this point I need to talk about freedom and the Christian believer. Two thoughts popped in my head as I read this and thought about Christian freedom:
 - i) The first is from a movie about the biblical character Joseph while he was suffering as a slave in Egypt. During that time, Joseph still trusted fully in God. His slave owner made a comment (not in the bible) that Joseph is the freest man he has ever met. The point is that even though Joseph was a slave, he was truly freer than all the other characters as portrayed in that movie.
 - ii) To explain that, let me give my second example. It comes from a pastor I studied under many years ago. He said one time, "I as a Christian am free to get drunk all I want. The question is "how much do I want to do that""? He went on to give other examples of sin and say in effect, I am free to sin all I want. The question is as a believer in Jesus, how much do I want to disappoint Him?
 - iii) The point of both examples is that to trust in God does give us the freedom to do whatever we want. But that freedom should also make us realize that even though we have such freedom, why would we use it to turn away from God?
 - iv) Think of an opposite example. We may think, "Why live like the bible desires us to live? Why not have "fun" by doing this or that?" That idea is in effect, "Hey, potentially become a slave to this particular sinful action instead of trusting in the God who created us in the first place. This is not about having hobbies. This is about trusting in things other than God Himself in order to get through life.
 - v) I want to stress again, that Christians don't need to live in a hole somewhere studying their bible all day. God gave us life in order to live it and appreciate it. At the same time, we should live our lives in order to glorify Him. My bottom line is the Christian life was never designed to be boring. We use our freedom to make a difference for Him.
 - b) This leads us back to this verse. The point is because we are free as Christians we do seek God through His word to learn how to best live out our lives for His glory.
8. Verse 46: I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame,
- a) This is a verse that makes scholars speculate about who was the writer, because it says that the psalmist desired to speak before kings. Was the psalmist a king of Israel speaking to other kings or someone who has access to the throne room of the King of Israel? Whoever the writer was, the point is it was the writers' desire to speak before kings.
 - b) OK John, and this is relevant to me how? I believe the idea is that if we develop a trust in God, we develop over time the boldness to speak about Him to others. If all of sudden we were put in a room with a bunch of famous people, we still develop the courage to say the trust about what God wants to teach us about life.

- c) This reminds me of a time when I was in business graduate school. I was invited to a conference with a lot of national business leaders. One of the main speakers was a well-known devout Christian (Chuck Colson). That event was 20 years ago. I remember how I saw roughly a third to a half of those leaders walk out of the room at the moment when Mr. Colson mentioned Jesus' name.
 - i) Mr. Colson was not afraid to speak the truth before great leaders, even though it probably bothered him that a large portion of his audience walked out on him.
 - ii) But John, this verse here in the psalms says we won't be put to shame for speaking the truth. Didn't all those people leaving put Mr. Colson to shame? No. Many people will always reject Jesus. The real question is, who is our audience?
 - a) It is not "them" but God. We will never cause God to look down at shame on us for doing the right thing, no matter what sort of response we get.
 - iii) OK John, if God can't learn, how can He be ashamed of us? The idea is not that God is up in heaven complaining about how we messed up. The idea is that we can miss or blow opportunities to make that difference for Him.
 - d) OK John second question: Is it appropriate to bring up Jesus in such a situation? In your business example, was it appropriate to discuss Jesus to a group of people that don't care about Him? I wasn't the speaker and I can't read his mind. I just know that God calls us to have boldness for Him, and to teach wisely. At the same time, we shouldn't cheat say, our time at work so as to preach the Gospel message to others.
 - i) One of my favorite teachers, Greg Koukl, has a philosophy that it is better to put a pebble in someone's shoe (i.e., give them something to think about) as opposed to trying to hit a home run about the gospel message.
 - ii) My point is we don't have to worry about trying to convert everyone we meet at every moment. We just have to live our lives being a good witness for Jesus, and when the right opportunities come, we should do our best to be that good witness.
9. Verse 47: for I delight in your commands because I love them. ⁴⁸ I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.
- a) In the previous verse, it talked about speaking boldly for God. Here in Verse 47 it says that we delight in God's commandment because we love them.
 - i) To say it another way, "We have the boldness to speak to others about God because we have taken the time to learn what His word has taught us.
 - b) This leads to my second issue about this verse: It says that the psalmist loves God's commandments. Does that mean he loves it more than he loves God? One reason I included Verse 48 here with Verse 47 is that both verses are implying that the writer actually worshipped God's word as Verse 48 says he lifted his hands to God's words.
 - i) This does not mean we should love God's word more than God Himself. The idea is that what He desires of us is written in His word. Remember that decrees in the bible are essentially God's laws.
 - ii) The text is saying in effect, "I am impressed with what God's word teaches me and I will show respect to His word because well, I am impressed."
 - iii) That is what I believe Verse 48 means by "lifting my hands toward his word."
 - c) OK, we made it through the first group of eight verses. Time for the next one.
10. Verse 49: Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. ⁵⁰ My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.
- a) The next section describes a situation where the writer is separating himself from those who don't trust in God's word. The idea is while others around us don't care about God and His word, we will still cling closely to it. The idea here is that the psalmists trust in God's word gives him hope for the future no matter whatever he is facing in life.
 - b) The idea is a request in effect for God to keep His word close to the heart of the believer.

- c) This leads us to Verse 50. The psalmist is describing a time of suffering. The promises of God's word preserved him through whatever he was dealing with at that time.
 - i) The bible is full of promises to the believer. Christian bookstores commonly sell little books listing God's promises to us based on specific bible verses. Salvation is only one of hundreds of promises. The other important promise is to grasp is that God is always watching over and guiding our lives. Keeping such thoughts in mind can and does preserve us through whatever we are dealing with in life.
 - ii) OK, John, what if my suffering has nothing to do with religious issues? What if I am just really sick or am dealing with a really bad problem at the moment?
 - a) The idea is still the same: God's promises for our future give us the mental strength to help us through the best and worst times of our lives. That is how God preserves us and that is the promise associated with this verse.
 - d) OK John, one more thing: What about those who have been martyred? How has God's word persevered them? The answer is it usually gives them the strength to deal with whatever it is they have to face. God never promises we will live through every bad situation. He promises to be there with us in every situation and if it is His will to take us home during that time, it will happen.
11. Verse 51: The arrogant mock me without restraint, but I do not turn from your law.
- a) There have been people throughout history who think that studying the bible is a waste of time and such people mock those of us who do study it. Now that we live in an era of social media such mocking is easier to find if we are willing to take a stand for God.
 - i) The point of this verse is simply that we don't let mockers discourage us from what God calls us to do in life. We don't let them discourage us from trusting in Him to guide our lives and trusting in His word for our lives.
 - b) To paraphrase this verse: "Others may say I'm wasting my time, but I still spend time daily reading Your word and I still believe it is written by God to guide my life."
 - c) OK John, there are a number of books that claim to be God inspired. How do you separate the bible from those other books? Other books give good advice on how to live. The bible is the only book full of fulfilled predictions about history to validate it as God's word.
12. Verse 52: I remember your ancient laws, O LORD, and I find comfort in them.
- a) The idea here is that we may be aware that God's laws have been around for millennia, but we still trust in them. Think of this verse this way: People are always interested in the latest and greatest thing. How does that latest thing compare to God's word?
 - i) Recently one of my best friends, a youth minister, was struggling because his church leadership wanted to change the children's program to get away from the bible to a program based on a new book on how to teach children. My friend finds far more comfort in the ancient and timeless words of the bible than he does in the latest and greatest book on how to specifically do that particular task.
 - a) The epilogue is that the church leaders realized the mistake of focusing on what the latest book taught. He is continuing to teach the bible.
 - ii) That incident ties well to this verse about finding comfort in God's word far more than comfort whatever is the latest phase going through our local world.
13. Verse 53: Indignation grips me because of the wicked, who have forsaken your law.
- a) To paraphrase, "I get angry at people because they reject studying God's word".
 - b) We can't control other people. To paraphrase what James Dobson once said when he was accused of leading millions of people: "I can't get my dog to do what I want, so how I can I possibly be accused of leading other people to do my will?"
 - c) The idea of this verse is that we may get angry at how people live their lives without the influence of God's word, but in reality we can't do much about it.
 - i) We can't fix or change other people. We can only help people who ask for our help. Still it hurts us to see people who forsake God and that's the point here.

14. Verse 54: Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge.
- a) The idea of this verse is that wherever we are living, God desires that we think about Him and live with the desire to please Him with our lives.
 - b) It is interesting that this verse mentions "my song". While the bible is full of poems and songs, I have a hard time thinking of God's word as a song. So why does the writer describe God's word as a song?
 - i) To answer, notice again the text says "my song". It is a poetic way of saying, "You want to understand my life? Then listen to me tell of my love for God."
 - c) Does that mean I need to be singing about God as I drive down the road? Well, not if it distracts you from driving. The idea is that we make God part of our lives even to the point where His word comes out of our mouths to be able to share it with other people.
15. Verse 55: In the night I remember your name, O LORD, and I will keep your law.
- a) OK John, why the emphasis on remembering God at nighttime? It could be as simple as the concept of thinking about God before we sleep at night. It also includes the idea that nighttime can be a scary time because we don't know what is outside when it is dark. The point is whatever life throws at us, won't stop us from trusting in God.
 - i) We can also broaden this verse to say in effect, "When my life is going through a really dark time, I will trust in God's word to preserve me through that time."
16. Verse 56: This has been my practice: I obey your precepts.
- a) This section of eight verses ends by saying in effect, "No matter what life has thrown at me, I have trusted in Your word." This verse is an appropriate ending to this section about trusting God through all of the different challenges that life can throw at us.
 - b) With that said, it's time to move on to the next group of eight verses.
17. Verse 57: You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words.
- a) Let me first summarize this next group of eight verses that begins with this verse. This section is about making a strong effort to praise God for His word even to the point of desiring to hang out with other people who think the same way we do.
 - i) To put it another way, "Give God all we've got and join others to do so."
 - b) Now let's look at Verse 57: When the text says, "You are my portion", it is effectively saying, "God is mine". That means I belong to God and therefore, He belongs to me.
 - i) This verse means it is our goal to do His will in life, and that simply means we trust in His word to guide us as to what to do in life.
 - ii) If it is our desire to think of God as "mine", that is in effect the desire to do His will, then promising to obey the words of God's laws would be the logical necessity to think of God as "mine" and vice versa.
 - iii) OK John, if I say, "God is mine", what does that mean practically? It simply means we trust that He is guiding our lives. We seek Him for that guidance.
18. Verse 58: I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise.
- a) The idea of this verse is we want God to bless our lives. The bible promises us that if we do seek God, in effect He is obligated to bless us. We have bound God to a promise. If one wants to see how true that is, try living in obedience and watch the "joy" come.
 - b) OK time for another quick lecture on what is God's blessing: It does not mean we become rich with material things for trusting in Him. It does mean that He does guide us down the path He desires for our lives. I think of being joyful when I think of His blessing.
 - c) This leads us back to this verse. In order to receive His blessing, God wants us to give it all we've got. That does not mean we are to be perfect. It just means we make the effort to please God with every aspect of our lives.
 - d) The second part of this verse is the reminder that in effect God is now required to bless us, if we are obedient. Consider for the moment that we have just "bound" God to keep a promise. That is something wonderful we can trust in as we go through our lives working to make a difference for Him.

19. Verse 59: I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes.
- a) Translation: I thought about the best way to live and decided that obedience to God is it.
 - b) Question: By this point in the psalms, wouldn't that be obvious? After all, John, you have been lecturing us for a lesson and one half now about obedience to God's word. So why did the psalmist make such a statement here in the middle of this long psalm?
 - i) Perhaps the psalmist is just being reflective of where he is in life. Most of us at times pause and consider if we are doing the right thing.
 - ii) I also find it is necessary at times to pause, think about what I am doing in a particular situation and think, "Is this really what God wants of me now?"
 - iii) Sometimes the hardest decisions to make in life involve different choices that all seem like good possibilities. When tough decisions are needed, I find that a lot of Christians I know wait for obvious confirmations from God before moving on and making those decisions. When we have to make choices now, we may even pray, God, bless it or block what I have to decide to do at this moment in time.
 - iv) Just so you know, I tend to be leery of signs. I believe Satan's forces are more than willing to give us signs to do his will. I am more interested in my decisions being in alignment with God's will based on principals as taught in His word is better than making decisions strictly based on just signs.
20. Verse 60: I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands.
- a) Here is another "give it all we've got" verse. I suspect the writer was contemplating some decision that involved making a choice about trusting God or not. By Verse 60, the psalmist decided that no matter what the cost, he would not delay to obey God.
 - b) OK, let me give an example of this principal: Suppose we have to make a big financial decision. One choice involves something that causes us to violate a biblical principal, but it will also cause us to have more money. The other choice appears to be more what God desires for our lives but we will make less money with this choice.
 - i) Now let me make it a little tougher: Suppose we have to work two jobs or a job we don't like in order to support our loved ones. Sometimes in order to please God we have to do what we are not crazy about doing. The point in both cases is that God will bless our lives if we are willing to make that right choice.
 - ii) OK John, what if I don't know what is that right choice? Welcome to the club. Sometimes we just have to move forward, make the best decision possible and trust that God is guiding us through that decision.
 - c) All of this talk about decisions does lead me back to this verse: The point is if we make that effort to seek God as much as possible, He does bless our decisions and our lives.
21. Verse 61: Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law.
- a) My loose translation: Nothing will stop me from doing God's desire for my life. I may be in a situation where I am literally or figuratively tied up, but I will still trust in Him to guide my life and trust in His word to guide my life. OK, enough said on this verse. ☺
22. Verse 62: At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.
- a) OK John does this verse mean I have to set my alarm clock for midnight so I can stand up and praise God for His laws? Well, not exactly.
 - i) The idea is that we appreciate what God teaches us so much that at any time of the day or night we are willing to praise Him our lives.
 - ii) Think of it this way: God's desire is obedience all hours of the day or night. If we are awake at midnight, we should appreciate Him as much then as we do at whatever time we are awake and guiding our lives.
 - b) So how should I be thinking about His laws when I am awake, let alone praising Him at midnight? It is about giving God the best part of our day and then trusting Him to guide the rest of our day. If we do that, we may look back at our day and realize just how much He has blessed us for our obedience. That is what this verse is trying to convey to us.

23. Verse 63: I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts.
 - a) In other words, we should be friends with others who also desire to seek God.
 - b) It amazes me as I go to church how I can be a friend to those whom otherwise, I have nothing in common with. I have developed good friendships with people from totally different backgrounds. I have learned from them and grow as a believer because of them.
 - c) An advantage of living in a big city is meeting lots of different Christians from different backgrounds. The point is God has given us a heart for other people and especially those who also desire to seek Him for their lives. He never desires we go at it alone as we seek Him, but also seek out others whom we can share our love of Him with.
24. Verse 64: The earth is filled with your love, O LORD; teach me your decrees.
 - a) The King James Version says "God's mercy" as opposed to His love filling the earth. Either way, how does God's love or His mercy fill the earth? This verse reminds us of His existence and the fact that there are people all over the world that trust in Him.
 - b) It always amazes me to consider that Christianity started off as a small offshoot of another relatively obscure religion. Both Judaism and Christianity effectively started off as a small group of people who trusted in a God that no one around them believed in. Christianity has grown to become one of the dominant religions in the world. That concept alone helps to support the concept of God's love and mercy filling the world.
 - c) Even before Christianity began, knowledge of God filled the earth because all people have instinctive knowledge of right and wrong.
25. Verse 65: Do good to your servant according to your word, O LORD.
 - a) To summarize this next section of eight verses: I was afflicted (brought down somehow) because I went away from what God desired of my life. However I have learned from my situation and it has driven me back to His word:
 - i) God uses our mistakes to drive us back to Him. Does that excuse our mistakes? Of course not. Was God aware of our bad choices? Yes. Since God loves us, He is always working to bring every aspect of our lives in conformity to His will. He works on us even when we make decisions that lead us away from Him.
 - b) All of this leads me back to Verse 65. The idea here is that God has done well for us based on the principals taught in His word. Let me explain:
 - i) If one is trusting in Jesus for one's salvation, one can start by appreciating the fact God the Father has chosen us. God didn't pick us so we can then ignore Him. He calls on us to live to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) If God wants to bless our lives anyway, why should we ask Him to do so? Another good question. The short answer is to make us appreciate what He is doing and to notice God working in our lives.
26. Verse 66: Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.
 - a) Let me paraphrase this verse in a prayer, "Dear God, I believe that your commandments will lead me to live the best life possible. Therefore, I pray that You help me understand what it is today You want me to learn from them as I spend some time studying them."
 - i) To say it another way, we can't understand our bible unless He is guiding us. This is why it is necessary to pray as part of studying God's word. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand what it is we are reading. Remember that the main function of the Holy Spirit is to glorify God the Father. The Spirit is guiding us to comprehend what God wants us to learn as we study His word.
27. Verse 67: Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.
 - a) My translation: Before I started studying God's word, I made bad decisions for my life.
 - b) The idea of this verse is to remember when we make mistakes how much better it is to trust in God then it is to live our lives without His guidance. When we do make mistakes, the idea is to acknowledge He is right and then ask His guidance to lead us down the path He does desire for our lives. That is the idea of both confession and obedience.

28. Verse 68: You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.
- a) God wants the best for our lives. He does not look down from heaven and say, "OK this person wants to trust me, let me ruin his or her life for awhile and see what happens". ☺
 - b) I'm not saying life will be easy as a believer. I am saying that choosing to live for God is the best decision we can make for one's life. Therefore, we should desire to learn from God's word, as it is the best way to live out one's life.
29. Verse 69: Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart.
- a) My loose translation: While nonbelievers have stated how the bible is not the true word of God, they often live out successful lives without Him. Still, I will stick to what I know is true: God is real, His word is the Word of God and that is how I should live.
 - b) OK John, explain why there are successful people who ignore Him? The short answer is they have a gift for that success. Instead of glorying God with their gift, they have used it for some purpose that has no everlasting or positively eternal consequences.
 - i) So how do we know our view of eternity is correct? That is why the bible is the only "holy book" filled with predictions about history that have come true. In other words, the bible does a great job by itself showing it alone is God's word.
 - c) All of this leads back to this verse. We can hear lies about reasons to turn from God, but we should still choose to follow Him and study His word despite those lies.
30. Verse 70: Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law.
- a) The consequence of turning from God is one become "callous and unfeeling". That means people generally get more selfish over time since they don't care about eternal things.
 - b) But John, what about people who do good but don't believe in our God? That is the argument of Judaism. They believe God judges people based on whether or not they have lived a good life. Let me explain the flaw with that view:
 - i) Unless we accept the idea that God's standards are perfection, we can never know what are God's standards for our lives and our salvation. Given that concept we accept the idea of Jesus' payment for the perfect forgiveness of our sins. Only then we can let Him work through our lives to make that difference for Him.
 - ii) OK then, if God expects us to be "perfectly forgiven", why then is it necessary for us to dwell in His laws? It is not about being a better Christian. It is about living the type of life He desires for us. It is about choosing to be obedient because we love Him, not to impress Him.
31. Verse 71: It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.
- a) Sometimes the best way for us to learn is to suffer. Most of us do realize that we learn far more from our mistakes than our successes. The psalmist realized that fact and he was grateful that he suffered some sort of affliction, as that drove him back to God's word.
 - b) Do you want another incentive to learn God's word? Think about some of the times in our lives where we have strayed away from Him. Yes we can wallow in our mistakes or we just say, "God I can't change." However, one can trust in God to change us on His timing even though we can't change ourselves.
32. Verse 72: The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.
- a) This section ends with a cute analogy that God's word should mean more to us than any amount of silver or gold, or any another material thing for that matter. Again, it doesn't mean we can't earn a living or enjoy this life. It just means that we put this life in the perspective of the eternal and we get our priorities right. If we are willing to commit time to learning His word, I find that God does bless us in order to guide our lives.
 - b) To state it another way, there is no greater purpose in this life than to do His will. That life is greater than any amount of silver or gold or anything else one can think of.

33. Verse 73: Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.
⁷⁴ May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word.
- a) I can summarize this next section of eight verses with the statement: May I be a good example to others because I have trusted in Your word. That's not obvious in Verse 73, but it becomes more obvious as you read it in context of this section of eight verses.
 - b) This verse is simply a reminder that God created us and therefore it is not an accident that we are alive at this time. Further, because God has called us to serve Him, He gives us the ability to understand what His word is teaching us.
 - c) If you have doubts that your life has any eternal purpose, I would simply make that commitment to obey God and watch how He can and does use us for His glory.
 - d) That positive thought leads to Verse 74. The idea is, "May my life for You be noticeable to others. May others who seek You be joyful with me as we seek God together."
 - i) I just stated how if we are willing to commit our lives to make a difference for Him, it will, no matter what the length of our life. We may not even realize how we are making an impact on other believers, but again, if we are willing to make that commitment, God does use our lives for the benefit of other believers.
 - ii) OK John, what about horrible situations? For example, how do you explain children dying young? If this life is all that there is, life would never be fair.
 - a) Next, it may be something God wanted to teach the parents about trust in Him. I can't explain all bad things. I just know that God uses our lives to make a difference for Him.
34. Verse 75: I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. ⁷⁶ May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.
- a) My translation of Verse 75: I know that You have allowed difficult things to happen to me in order to draw me back or closer to You. I know that You are faithful to working in my life even when I have suffered for my own mistakes. I know You are faithful even when I have suffered due to no fault of my own. No matter what God, You are there.
 - b) But John, Verse 75 implies His laws afflict us. Think of that as God allowing bad things to happen to us to help us grow and trust in Him all the more.
 - c) So how does that bad stuff lead to the comfort as stated in Verse 76? The idea is that God is always faithful even when we are not faithful to Him. God desires to guide our lives through His word and through prayer even when we have been afflicted for some reason.
35. Verse 77: Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.
- a) To understand this verse, remember that the writer was afflicted in some way. I don't know how bad he was hurt or how he was suffering, but I just know that he turned to God's word as a source of compassion.
 - i) OK John, if we are physically hurt, doesn't that mean we need treatment? Of course it does and that is not the point. Nothing can pick us up like remembering why God called us to live (to make a difference for Him). It is also a reminder that no matter how bad life is at that moment, God is there and guiding us. That is the delight the writer is describing at this moment in time.
36. Verse 78: May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts.
- a) If you recall from a few verses back, there were those who putdown the psalmist, because he trusted in God. The psalmist asks that those arrogant people be brought to shame. Notice he doesn't ask for their death, just their shame. The idea is we don't want anyone to be in hell, but hopefully that they see the errors of their ways.
 - b) Verse 78 then comes back to the desire of the psalmist to mediate (think about) God's word. The idea in effect is "God, what happens to those who want to put me down, is in effect Your problem. I can't fix other people. All I can do is work on my own life and I do that by focusing on what You desire of my life, which is what Your word teaches."

37. Verse 79: May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes.
- a) Translation: Help me be a good example to others. May others look to me as a way to follow God. Notice this is not a request to be perfect, but simply to live a way that shows others we are following God with our lives.
38. Verse 80: May my heart be blameless toward your decrees, that I may not be put to shame.
- a) This verse is saying that we keep on focusing on what God desires of our lives. That way, we are less likely to make a mistake and less likely to feel the shame of mistakes.
 - b) OK, I promised we'd make it to the halfway point in this lesson, and we only have eight verses left to get to that point. Take a deep breath as we are almost there. ☺
39. Verse 81: My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word.
- a) The verses in this section begin with the Hebrew letter pronounced "Kaph". What is worth knowing about this letter is that it is shaped roughly like a letter "C". Think of this letter turned sideways, shape kind of like reaching out for something to fill our hands. In other words, our hands are open in a half-circle in order to receive something.
 - i) Well John, that's neat. I can tell its time for your next "why should I care" speech: The point is this Hebrew alphabet letter is associated with receiving something (like our hands formed in a half circle to receive a gift). It is the desire of the psalmist to be blessed by God. In fact, this eight-verse section describes a sense of desperation. The idea is to realize how desperate we are for God's blessing.
 - b) Believe it or not, this also ties back to my lesson theme of "climbing a mountain". To explain, I want to share that in preparation for this lesson, I did a little research on the topic of long distance runners hitting "the wall". Let me explain: That expression is describing a feeling marathon runners get when their bodies get physically depleted and they have trouble going forward. Now that we are approaching the halfway point of this psalm, I thought it would be a good topic to bring up the issue of hitting our own "wall".
 - i) Doing any big project like a marathon or climbing a mountain, one can reach a point where one thinks, "I can't go on any more". The marathon runners have to mentally push themselves to get past this point to continue the race.
 - ii) OK John, and what does this have to do with this verse and this psalm? The point is the writer felt a tremendous sense of desperation for God and His word in His life, and I see that desperation of saying, "I can't go on any more in my own strength, I can only do this by my full dependence upon God and His word."
40. Verse 82: My eyes fail, looking for your promise; I say, "When will you comfort me?"
- a) Here in this verse, the writer is saying, "I have looked and looked for God to comfort me. However, I am about to give up. When will this moment of comfort come?"
 - i) Now think back to my runner's "wall" illustration. Or think of a time in one's life when one literally didn't know what to do next and felt no comfort from God.
 - ii) I can recall a few moments in my life where I literally cried out to God, "I don't know what to do here. I need your help just to take the next step." What amazes me in hindsight is how God answered those prayers and fairly quickly.
 - iii) That is the sense of desperation the psalmist is describing here.
41. Verse 83: Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke, I do not forget your decrees.
- a) This verse is describing being so burnt out that the writer didn't know what to do next. The illustration of "wineskin in smoke" is about feeling like one is no good to anyone anymore in my life. A wineskin was used to transport wine. If it is placed in a smoky location, the wineskin will dry up to the point where it is no good to be used.
 - b) Believe it or not, this gets back to my "running and the wall" illustration. When a runner gets to a point where they can't go on, they simply have to physically tell themselves to move forward as their body doesn't want to cooperate. The psalmist is saying something similar like, "Even though I don't know what to do next, I still trust in Your laws as they are best for my life." With that sense of desperation and trust, we're ready to move on.

42. Verse 84: How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors?
- a) Here is one of the few verses in the psalm that is not a direct praise to God or giving some sort of honor to His word. One gets the feeling that whatever the reason the psalmist was complaining at this moment, it also involved being persecuted by enemies. The writer is saying, "How much longer do I have to put up with this bad stuff? When will You, God take care of those people so I can relax and get on with my life?"
 - b) Notice the desperation running through this eight-verse section. So what do we do when don't know how much longer we have to suffer? This is one of those points where we remind ourselves that God is still there, He is still in charge, He still cares about our lives and He is still working on His timing to guide us through our situations. Yes we still have to make decisions what to do, but the results of our lives is God's problem, not ours. If we belong to Him, then the outcome of our situations are "His problems" to deal with.
43. Verse 85: The arrogant dig pitfalls for me, contrary to your law.
- a) Know that to dig a pit was against biblical laws. Why is that? Exodus 21:33-34 teaches that a man (or a woman) is responsible for a pit that they dig. The bible forbids making such pits as it causes others be trapped in a pit (situation) that they didn't know was there.
 - i) The real issue is not literal pits, but the fact we can fall into traps set by people who don't care about being pleasing to God with their lives.
 - ii) The point is that people do things contrary to God's plan for all of our lives and their actions can hurt us. In other words, the sins caused by other people have effects on our lives. The solution is not to try to fix others, but to come back to our dependence on God to get us through our particular situations.
44. Verse 86: All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause.
- a) We don't always understand why others are trying to hurt us. We just know that living by God's desires for our lives is the best thing for us, period. Enough said here.
45. Verse 87: They almost wiped me from the earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts.
⁸⁸Preserve my life according to your love, and I will obey the statutes of your mouth.
- a) To finish up this section, the idea is that we were almost wiped out completely, but despite that pressure and pain, I still stuck to what You have called me to do.
 - b) It ends with the idea that no matter how long we live, God will preserve us with His love and we should take His love for us to be obedient to His desires for our lives.
46. OK, we've now made to the halfway point of the psalm. I'm not going to try to summarize this whole lesson because I see each eight-verse section as a separate topic. As I've stated, the uniting theme is appreciating God's word and how it relates to the life of the believer. Each of the eight-verse topics unite under the common theme of appreciating His word.
- a) Hopefully you have not hit your own wall yet reading these lessons and can get through the next two lessons on this psalm some time in the near future.
47. At this point, it would be best if I just close in prayer, and in the next lesson we'll start the great downhill march to the end of this psalm. Father, help us to grow in our trust in You. Help us to appreciate Your word as a source of life. We do not depend upon it for our salvation, but just understanding on the best way for us to live. Help us to realize our problems are now "Your problems", and we don't have to worry about our lives. Finally, help us to draw upon Your word to make a difference for You in the world around us. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.