

1. We now begin the third of four lessons on Psalm 119. Let me start by saying that if you have made it with me this far through this psalm, it is downhill from here as we start the second half. Therefore, I have decided to title this lesson "downhill". Since we made it to the halfway point in the last lesson, I consider it a downhill climb to the end of this psalm.
 - a) So why should I read this "downhill" lesson? The short answer is that if we do love God, then it should be our desire to develop a close love relationship with Him. One major way we develop that relationship is by spending lots of time in regular study of His word.
 - b) As we grow in our trust in Him, our fears of the future should diminish. I believe fear is the opposite of faith. As we grow in our faith we should fear less. If we fear less, our life should be "downhill" in the sense that we trust He is in charge of the outcome of our lives.
2. Let me expand a little more on the idea of the Christian life traveling downhill. Does the life of the Christian ever get any easier as one gets older? Truthfully, I've yet to see a believer whose life gets easier as one gets older. However, I have found there are times in our life in effect where it feels like God eases up on us. It is as if He is saying to us, "I've given enough for you to handle for the moment, so I won't pile on any more today". ☺
 - a) It would also be like God saying, "Tomorrow there will be new issues to deal with, but not today." Not every day of most of our lives has to be a struggle to survive. There are times when it does feel like we are traveling downhill and hopefully this lesson will give that sense of ease and comfort as we make it through the next section of this psalm.
 - b) That is why this lesson has a big emphasis on developing a close relationship with God through His word. That education through His word helps us to make good decisions. In that sense, our life is downhill as we shouldn't have to worry because of our trust in Him to help us through any and all mountains we have to climb and descend in our lives.
 - c) Gee John, that is a cute analogy. What about the psalm itself? Remember that each set of eight verses in this psalm has it's own theme. The entire psalm is united in that we are to study and appreciate His word. Let me also say that we are not to worship His word more than God Himself, and through a careful study of this psalm, that never happens.
3. Before we start let me give a quick review of Psalm 119 in order to explain where we are now.
 - a) This psalm is about appreciating God's word and how it benefits our life. It that is all it has to say, it would not require 196 verses. So know that it is more complicated than that.
 - b) Remember that this psalm is written in 22 groups of eight verses. Each group has it's own theme. It is amazing to learn how non-repetitive this psalm is.
 - c) Scholars nickname Psalm 119 the "Mount Everest" of the bible. It is far and away the longest psalm in the bible and also the longest bible chapter. Since the start of this lesson passes the halfway psalm point, I believe we are traveling downhill toward the end.
 - d) If you have read through the first two lessons on this psalm, one understands the pace that I'm setting for the last two, and hopefully one is used to that pace at this point. Therefore, I also consider this lesson as going downhill in that we have now established the speed of covering so many verses in a single lesson.
4. OK, that is all I want to say to get started, so at this point, let me break down and actually start the first set of eight verses of this lesson.
 - a) The theme of the eight verses that runs from Verse 89 to 96 is the eternalness of God's word. Stop and think of all the religions that have come and gone over the past several thousand years, yet the (big emphasis on "the") Word of God has survived in tact, despite neglect and criticism through out those millenniums. The appreciating of that eternalness is the theme of these eight verses. OK, with that said, Verse 89.

5. Psalm 111, Verse 89: Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.
 - a) The idea here is to consider that no matter how much our world has changed over the millenniums, God's word stands firm over that large time frame. The idea is effect that His standards for us don't change over time.
 - b) The psalmist wants us to appreciate the eternalness of God's word. In earlier psalms, King David, liked to compare God to a huge rock in the sense that He is stable and unmovable despite the changes that we experience in our lives. This is not saying that God is inanimate like a rock, but simply that He does not change based on what we do.
 - c) OK John, if we Christians are to live by faith in Jesus, how does that work in contrast to trusting in the eternity of God's word?
 - i) The answer is that Christians are considered in right standing before God not based on our obedience to God's word, but in our daily trust in Him for our lives.
 - ii) The laws of the bible teach us the way God desires we live. Those laws of course need to be studied in relationship to the New Testament.
 - iii) The way I can describe it is we live by faith that Jesus died for our sins. If we do live by that faith, we would just naturally want to do something about that faith.
 - a) Remember that we should study the bible not so God can love us more, but just to live the type of life He desires that we live.
 - d) Let me explain this one more way: Someone asked Jesus to name the most important commands in the bible. He said to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second (command) is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31 NIV.) That gives a pretty good idea of how God wants us to live our lives.
 - i) The point as it relates to this verse is that if we are to love God that much, then we should want to study what He has to say to us through His word. That is not only a key concept of this verse, but of this whole psalm as well.
6. Verse 90: Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. ⁹¹ Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.
 - a) In these two verses, the psalmist continues the idea of the eternalness of God's word.
 - b) In Verse 89, the emphasis was on how God's word is "eternal" in heaven.
 - i) In Verse 90, the emphasis is how God's word survives through all generations.
 - ii) In Verse 91, the emphasis is how it continues to this day.
 - c) One of the amazing things to consider is the effort made throughout history to ban the reading of God's word, and how it has survived through various time periods.
 - i) Unfortunately there were periods in history where the Roman Catholic Church banned public reading of scripture. By the way, the Roman Catholic Church today encourages public and private bible study, so they have changed through time.
 - ii) I always think of communist countries that made great efforts at points in time to ban the bible, and yet Christianity is flourishing in Russia and China today.
 - iii) Throughout modern history there are critics who write books denying the bible as God's word. It is amazing to watch such critics' come and go. Despite their best efforts, the bible continues to be trusted as God's word and such critics die out.
 - iv) If one wants proof of the bible as the word of God, spend a little time studying the history of this book and how it has survived through all sorts of situations.
7. Verse 92: If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.
 - a) My translation: I'm glad the bible has survived until this day, and if I had not delighted in what it had to say, the difficulties of my life would have overwhelmed me by now.
 - b) So John, are you saying the only way to get through the rough parts of life is via God's word? No, I'm saying it is the best source of comfort through one's trials. Knowing that God is watching over and carrying for us gives us the peace to survive tough times. I'm saying one reason for studying God's word is to give us comfort through tough times.

8. Verse 93: I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life.
 - a) The word precepts essentially refer to God's instructions. It literally means, "What God has appointed to be done." In other words the bible teaches us by stories, examples and by direct commands how He desires that we live out our lives.
 - b) Let me talk a little about bible memorization.
 - i) I don't believe God calls on us to go out and memorize the entire bible from start to finish. However, taking the time to commit certain verses to memory do have benefits to our lives. One of those benefits is that thinking about those verses do preserve us during difficult times. One never knows when such times will come.
 - ii) I remember reading about American prisoners surviving in Vietnamese prisoner of war camps. They told how recalling bible verses literally helped them to live through the most horrible of human conditions.
 - iii) Often it takes a will to survive to get through the worst of times and thinking about God's word helps to give us the perspective to live for another day.
 - c) All of that does lead back to this verse. The psalmist says in effect God's word has preserved his life. I don't know what that writer went through, but I suspect that his knowledge of the bible helped him get through some rough period of his life.
9. Verse 94: Save me, for I am yours; I have sought out your precepts.
 - a) A good thing to remind ourselves in tough times is that we belong to God. If we have committed our lives to serving Him, then by definition, we are on of His people.
 - i) If God loves all people, how can believers be His, more than others? The answer is that He in effect reaches out to all people, but only some choose to respond to that love. If we have made that choice to respond then we are "one of His".
 - ii) OK, if we are "one of His", why cry out for God to save us like this verse says? It is not to get God to react like He has forgotten about us. It is about reminding ourselves that He is there and He is watching over our lives.
 - b) This verse appears (key word) to be saying, "Hey God, look how special I am because I am spending time reading the bible." No, that is not what the psalmist is saying.
 - i) It is saying I belong to God and simply because do I belong to Him, I will spend time reading my bible to learn how to best live in order to be pleasing to Him.
 - c) In effect, this gets back to my lesson theme of "downhill". Let me explain:
 - i) If we remind ourselves that we belong to God and we spend time seeking Him, then the results of our lives are now His problem and not ours. In that sense, we "coast downhill" as we don't have to worry about the results of our lives. Yes we still have to make the best decisions possible, but we let God deal with the results.
10. Verse 95: The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes.
 - a) Let me freely translate again: "Dear God, I've got people out there who are looking for the opportunity to ruin my life and even bring it to an end. Instead of worrying about how I am going to deal with such people, I will focus on what Your word teaches me to do."
 - b) So John, does that mean we just read our bible and ignore our problems?
 - i) No, our problems don't magically go away when we read our bible. However, when we turn our issues over to God, it is amazing how our perspective changes.
 - ii) Going back to my prisoner of war story, some survived and some didn't. That doesn't mean God let down those who didn't. It means that if such people who died there did trust in God, He rescued them by "bringing them home" to Him.
 - iii) I have heard some amazing stories of people who have mentally suffered for years due to the damage done to them in really bad situations. Forgiveness of such people is not about letting them get away with their crimes. It is about letting go of the pain so God can work in our lives to draw us closer to Him.
 - c) My "bottom line" is no matter how bad our situation, we trust in God to see us through those trying to do us harm, and trust in His word through such times.

11. Verse 96: To all perfection I see a limit; but your commands are boundless.
- a) To understand this verse, understand that the first half refers to everything made by God. Let me expand and paraphrase this verse: "I see all the good things that exist in this world and some seem to be perfectly created. However, everything that appears to be perfect still has its flaws. The Word of God is greater than any of those things in that one can never fully comprehend what the bible is teaching us."
 - b) Let me share a New Testament related thought on this: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (John 21:25, NIV)
 - i) The point of that verse is one could never fully comprehend everything that Jesus did and taught. Also consider that there are millions of books that comment on God's word. It gives one an idea that one can spend one's entire life studying the bible and never exhaust what it teaches.
 - c) If God's word is so "boundless" as this verse teaches, why try to learn in the first place?
 - i) God never calls on us to learn every possibility of every verse. A prayer I like to use before I read my bible is, "Dear God, teach me what you want me to apply today to my life." In other words, just because the bible is boundless in what it can teach us should never be an excuse to ignore God's word in the first place.
 - d) We now start the next section of this psalm. This next section continues to focus on the benefits of studying God's word for our lives.
12. Verse 97: Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
- a) This verse is saying in effect "I love to read my bible and I think about it all day."
 - i) I don't think the psalmist literally ignored his job, as he was too busy reading his bible all of his waking hours. I suspect it simply means he spent regular time in God's word and it affected him as he went through his day.
 - b) Let me put it this another way: Can one literally think about God's law every moment of the day? Personally, I can't focus on anything for very long. Our brains can only focus on one thing for "so long" and that usually isn't very long a period of time.
 - i) That is why I suspect this verse is effectively saying, "I have made studying my bible such a part of my life, it affects all that I do." That is God's goal for us: that His word sinks in to our lives to the point where we think about it often.
 - c) Let me talk a little about "love" for a moment.
 - i) One can develop and grow in a love relationship. Think about someone that you love in your life, other than one's parents. There was a time period before we knew that person that we didn't love them. My point is simply that one can cultivate and grow a love a relationship with someone or even something.
 - ii) That applies to the bible as well. God desires that we grow in our love for Him by spending time studying one's bible. That is the love concept behind this verse.
13. Verse 98: Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.
- a) One has to admit, this verse appears arrogant. This verse is saying in effect that the bible student is smarter than someone who is trying to harm us.
 - b) To explain, let me explain the difference between knowledge, intelligence and wisdom:
 - i) Intelligence is about understanding how to deal with an issue. For example, how fast we know that eating takes away our hunger is how we apply intelligence.
 - ii) Knowledge is in effect education: If we are hungry and there is food there, knowledge is about understanding that eating that food takes away that hunger.
 - iii) Wisdom is the application of knowledge. It is actually eating that food.
 - c) This leads me back to the verse. It is not saying the psalmist can outwit his enemies. It is saying the psalmist is wiser because he applies the bible to his life while his enemies do not. The wisdom taught in the bible is greater than any wisdom used by nonbelievers. That is why we don't have to fear evil if we trusting in God for our lives.

14. Verse 99: I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. ¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.
- a) Before I say anything else, we've now made it to Verse 100. Since there is no Verse 200 (it ends at Verse 176), that is proof we are in the downhill phase of this psalm. Feel free to pause, grab your favorite desert, ☺ and know that the psalm is downhill from this point.
 - b) Of all the verses in this psalm, these are the two that I struggle with the most. If the last verse (#98) seemed arrogant in that the psalmist says he was wiser than his enemies, then these two verses are even more arrogant in that the psalmist is saying he is wiser than his own teachers and elders because he studies and obeys God's word.
 - i) OK John, does that mean you are wiser than your teachers? Does that mean I am wiser than my pastor who I know has studied his bible far more than I ever will? This verse is not saying we have more wisdom than our favorite teachers. In fact the writer is admitting here that he has had bible teachers in his life.
 - c) Here is what it is saying: Learning what God desires for our lives is much more than what any one teacher or any group of teachers can teach us. Learning our bible comes a lot from time in prayer and just thinking about God's word.
 - i) A famous preacher named Harry Ironside once told about a self-taught bible teacher he met. That other teacher told Mr. Ironside, "There with my open bible before me, I used to kneel for hours at a time and ask the Spirit of God to reveal Christ to my soul and to open the Word to my heart. God taught me more on my knees on that mud floor than I ever could have learned in all the seminaries or colleges in the world."
 - a) My gratitude to David Guzik's commentary for that story.
 - ii) My point is not that we have to find a mud floor and pray for hours. My point is the way God can give us even more insight into whatever issue we are facing is not just by listening to other teachers, but to spend time in prayer with God.
 - d) So John, does this mean I can just throw away your commentaries and go pray?
 - i) Remember that the psalmist did have bible teachers. If these studies are helping your lives then you are welcome to read them. The point is we should never ignore time alone with God in order to learn from other teachers.
 - e) In summary, the psalmist in these verses claimed he was wiser than his teachers and his elders. That simply means that God Himself wants to lead us to His answers for our issues and the best way to get those answers is to spend time with God and His word. In other words, we can trust Him to teach us what it is He wants us to learn.
 - f) On that happy note, we are ready for Verses 101 through 176, or at least Verse 101. ☺
15. Verse 101: I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.
- a) Now that the psalmist has finished describing how he has become wiser than other bible teachers based on his prayer life, he now comes back to the idea of "doing what is right". He does that in effect by avoiding what is evil.
 - i) To explain, recall from a number of lessons ago how I explained that worshipping God and obedience to Him go "hand in hand" and are intertwined concepts.
 - ii) That same principal applies to avoiding what is evil. We don't avoid evil by our willpower. We do what is right by sticking close to God and then we just end up through His power doing the right thing. The power of God working in our lives is far greater than any and all willpower to avoid bad decisions.
 - b) Does this mean we won't make any mistakes in life? Of course not. It just means that sticking close to what God calls us to do through His word does give us the guidance to make better decisions in life.
 - c) But what about when bad things just happen to me? That is a separate issue. We don't avoid problems because we are saved. God gives us the wisdom to guide us through the problems we face in life. That is the concept behind this verse.

16. Verse 102: I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.
 - a) This verse is a reminder to make God's laws (i.e., a study of His word) part of our routines for the rest of our lives. The final phrase says, "You (God) yourself have taught me."
 - i) That does not mean we ignore our teachers or have to be self-taught.
 - ii) It means that God teaches us some things through others and some things He teaches us directly from spending time alone with Him in His word.
17. Verse 103: How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
 - a) Most of us are familiar with the expression "chew on this" to think about something. That is in essence what this verse is saying. In a colorful way, this verse is saying that thinking about God's word taste better than something very sweet, and uses honey as an example.
18. Verse 104: I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.
 - a) Let me remind us that we are still in the same section where the writer said he was wiser than his teaches and elders based on His study of God's word. In these last few verses, the psalmist is essentially saying what got him that wise was not that he had more "brain power" than others, but simply that I spent a lot of time thinking about God's word.
 - b) This leads me back to when I talked about developing a love relationship with someone or something. Love is a relationship one develops over time. One can grow or fade in one's love for someone or something. As the expression goes, "Love is a commitment and not a feeling." Through this section, the writer is emphasizing the importance of a commitment to God's word and therefore he developed a love of God's word based on that commitment.
19. Verse 105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path
 - a) We now begun the next eight-verse section. The idea of this section is essentially that we will trust in God's laws to guide our lives no matter what happens.
 - b) That idea leads me to verse 105. This verse is commonly memorized as it summarizes a key point of this psalm: That God's word is a guide to how to live our lives.
 - c) A principal taught in the bible is that God guides us if we are moving. To put it another way, God will not drag us out of bed and tell us to do a particular thing. However as we go through our lives, His word does guide us in the best way to live that life. Since it should be the desire of the believer to be obedient to God, therefore studying His word is one way we actually perform that obedience to His desires for our life.
20. Verse 106: I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws.
 - a) Let me start here by talking a little about Christians taking oaths. Jesus said that believers don't need to swear any oaths, just let our "yes be yes and our no be no". (My paraphrase of Matthew 5:34.) Jesus point is not that we should never make any commitments in life. Jesus point is simply that we keep our word when we do make commitments.
 - i) For example, if we have made the decision with our lives to follow God then in effect we have made a commitment and God wants us to honor it.
 - b) With that little speech completed, the point is God desires we make the commitment to make His word part of our daily lives. We are not forced to make that commitment, but that in effect is what the psalmist did and what He desires of our lives.
 - i) To put it another way, if we have access to God's word, He desires that we make the commitment to regularly read and study our bible.
21. Verse 107: I have suffered much; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your word.
 - a) As we read verses like this we need to remind ourselves that God desires to guide and preserve our lives by His word. OK, how does it do that?
 - i) Let's start with something simple. His word teaches us to avoid sin. Committing sin is what gets us into trouble. That fact alone can preserve our life on earth.
 - ii) One can also read this verse as something eternal. If we are willing to commit our lives to Him, that preserves our lives for eternity in His presence.

- b) But John, this verse says the psalmist has suffered much. Does that mean we have suffer in order to follow God? Paul states that if we are willing to suffer for Jesus sake, we will also rule with Him. (2nd Timothy 2:12). Suffering in life is a promise to the believer that those little books of God's promises don't talk about very much, but is a reality of life.
 - i) If one does a search for suffering in the New Testament, it is a commonly discussed topic. Does that mean I should look for suffering? Of course not. It means that if we are living to make a difference for God, we will get resistance (i.e., "stuff happens") and that can lead to suffering.
 - ii) But John, how do you know what has caused our suffering? I don't. I just know that like the psalmist, God's word can comfort us through the worst of suffering.
 - iii) On that happy thought, ☺ I'll sneak over to the next verse.
- 22. Verse 108: Accept, O LORD, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws.
 - a) To explain this verse, I need to explain the Old Testament concept of a "free will" offering. In the original text, the phrase "willing praise" is the same words as this type of offering.
 - i) In the Old Testament system of offerings, there were obligatory offerings made to God (by the Jewish people) and separate free will offerings. Without giving a long lecture here about different types of offerings, the point here is that we can choose at any time to freely make a non-obligatory offering to God.
 - ii) No I'm not talking about giving money at church or the Jewish system of offering animals. I'm talking about being willing to tell God how much we love Him and being grateful for our relationship with Him. That is the point of this verse.
 - b) To paraphrase this verse, "By learning what it is God wants me to learn and living the life that He desires me to live, I have learned to appreciate what a wonderful life that is. Therefore, let me just take a moment to express my thanks to God for guiding my life."
- 23. Verse 109: Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law.
 - a) To paraphrase, "Although I regularly do things that require taking risks with my life, I will still consider your laws in order to guide my lives. This calls for an example:
 - i) Think about driving a car. One can easily swerve into oncoming traffic and endanger one's life. However, knowing that killing is wrong (including self preservation) instinctively causes us to protect one's life. That built-in sense of life preservation is a simple example of living according to God's word.
 - b) In the psalmist day, he lived in a world where the enemies of Israel were all around him. In order for the psalmist to live his life, he had to take risks that would significantly affect his life. Coming back to our lives, it can mean being willing to take a stand for God can be life threatening at some points in our lives. The point is we still stick to what God teaches us when we are faced the risks of living for God.
- 24. Verse 110: The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts.
 - a) By now, one is understanding how this group of eight verses is about being preserved by God no matter what life throws at us. That scenario gets more dangerous in Verse 110 by mentioning the fact that a wicked person has set some sort of trap for the psalmist.
 - b) OK John, how could we be caught in some sort of snare (i.e., trap)? If our enemies know we have developed certain habits in our worship of God, they could use them against us.
 - i) For example, we could be falsely accused of not working hard at a job because we were too busy praying or doing things for others. My point is that one's enemies can learn our habits and then make false accusations based on our lifestyles.
 - ii) Besides the issue of trying to avoid things that can cause false accusations to come, sometimes in life they do come anyway. The psalmist is saying that despite those risks, he is still sticking to what God desires for his life as a believer.
 - c) Let me try this one more way: Why would an enemy want to set a "snare" (i.e., trap) for us? Over and above just wanting to steal from us or hurt us, some people just don't like the idea that we follow God. It bothers their conscious and it can cause them to set traps.

25. Verse 111: Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. ¹¹² My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.
- a) The psalmist wraps up this section about sticking close to God by stating in effect what a joy God's word is to his life. It is the desire of the psalmist to keep obeying it forever.
 - b) I want to focus on the word "forever" here. I would argue that learning about God's desire for our lives go on forever. I heard one preacher (David Guzik) say that it was his desire to teach bible studies in heaven. If other people won't listen to him, maybe God will require some angels listen to what Mr. Guzik is teaching.
 - i) I'm not saying that we will be required to take bible studies in heaven. I am saying that God's word should be such a joy to us that learning from His word should continue forever. Forever would include the next life.
 - c) This leads to the next question: How much joy do we have over studying God's word? Does it bring joy to our heart? Does it want to make us keep His word with us forever?
 - i) This brings me back to the issue of a love relationship. Such a relationship can grow or dim over time based on effort. For those of us who are married, there was a time before we knew we were in love with our spouse. That relationship had to be developed and grow over time. My point is simply that one's love for someone or something can grow and should be nurtured so it continues to grow.
 - ii) That same principal should apply to our love for His word. Nobody forces us to love God's word. It is something that just has to be developed over time.
26. Verse 113: I hate double-minded men, but I love your law.
- a) We now start the next section of eight verses. The theme here is about God preserving those who do trust in His law. In other words, it is not by our strength that He guides our lives, but about God Himself providing us with the ability to follow His word.
 - i) But John, don't we have to learn on our own to read and obey His commands? Yes, but I also find that God Himself provides us with the strength to obey.
 - ii) Let me share an example: Sometimes when I start to work on these studies I am tired and don't feel like writing at that moment. It never ceases to amaze me how God blesses my time when I focus on His word. I give God all the credit as He guides me even though I am the one who makes the effort to seek Him.
 - b) With that self-gratifying ego statement completed, ☺ it's time to focus on Verse 113.
 - i) This verse itself is talking about "double minded men". Let me explain: It would be like meeting a person who goes to church regularly, but still never thinks twice about some sort of sinful lifestyle when not in church. I'm not talking about Christians who commit a sin. We are all guilty of that. The issue is people who claim they are following God, but in effect don't put their hearts into it.
 - ii) To put it another way, I suspect we all know people who go to church, but that's about it for their commitment to God. They go because it relieves a sense of guilt that they need to do something for God. I started picturing "mafia types" who still go to church, but they may kill someone between weekly services.
 - iii) With that said, the point of the second half of this verse is simply that God's laws (i.e., studying our bible) should drive us to make a full commitment of our lives to being obedient to God and not just how we act on Sundays.
27. Verse 114: You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.
- a) The first half of Verse 114 is describing God's word as the writer's hiding place. A shield is what protects one from an arrow or a bullet being fired at us. The point is one thinks of God's word as a method of protection. Obviously this verse is not being literal. It is not talking about using our bible literally stopping bullets.
 - i) The idea is that God's word does teach us the best way to live and that does protect us from danger. I could expand, but hopefully one gets the idea here.

28. Verse 115: Away from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commands of my God!
- a) Stop and think about the literalness of this verse for the moment. Do we literally tell people that they are evildoers and they have to get away from us because we are busy trying to do God's will? Of course not. Such people wouldn't stop if we did make such a literal statement. So if it is not that literal, what is this verse saying?
 - i) Imagine saying to someone in a nice way, "I can't join in your activity. It may be fine for you to do that, but it is not what I choose to do at this moment".
 - ii) One interesting fact about living a life for God is that the friends we make before we become believers will often grow bored with us. They may see we are no longer interested in say, getting drunk with them, and in effect they will leave us alone as we don't want to join in their activities. Little do they know that living for God leads to a far greater life than what such people consider a boring lifestyle.
 - iii) As a different type of example, I once read about a professor at a Christian college who states that once in a while he likes to spend time with non-Christians just to remember how bad it is out there. We may not have to do likewise, but if we have been following God for a while, we can forget how difficult it is to live a life without God being the center of that life.
 - b) This leads me back to this verse. The point is Christians should be living differently from nonbelievers. Yes we are saved by faith alone, but if we have such faith, our actions and our lifestyle should be a natural output of that faith. Living differently from how nonbelievers live should be part of that lifestyle based on our trust in God.
29. Verse 116: Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.
- a) Let me paraphrase this verse: I have hope that trusting in God leads me to a life full of joy. I want to be a happy person in life and trusting in God gives me that joy. Don't let me down God. I want to have that joy of doing Your will.
 - i) OK John, if God is perfect and can't learn anything, why pray like this? It is a reminder that the joy we do have comes from Him, and not from trying harder.
 - ii) To pray for God to sustain us is the reminder that we are dependant upon Him and not our own efforts to have such joy in life.
 - b) So does God ever let us down in life? The answer is yes in the sense that life can be difficult and we may not understand why He is allowing certain things to happen.
 - i) God never promises us a pain free life. However, He does promise to give us joy through our pain if we are willing to trust in His promises of eternal life. Further, He does give us joy in this life not based on our circumstances, but based on the simple idea that the results of our efforts for Him are His problem and not ours.
 - c) For what it is worth, I feel like I am zipping quickly through a lot of verses. However, if we are going to make it to Verse 176 in four lessons, I need to keep moving along.
30. Verse 117: Uphold me, and I will be delivered; I will always have regard for your decrees.
- a) When the text says, "uphold me", think of lacking the strength to go on in life. There are moments when we feel so tired or worn out we don't have the strength to go on.
 - i) It is during such moments where we may ask God to uphold us.
 - ii) If one reads the Gospels, one notices that Jesus took a lot of time to either pray by Himself or go be alone with the disciples. The issue is not about getting more sleep. The issue is about trusting God to sustain us and give us the physical strength to endure what it is He wants us to endure. That is the idea here.
 - b) This leads to the rest of this verse: So far I have only described the use of prayer in order to sustain us. This verse is describing God's word as sustaining us.
 - i) Besides prayer, another method to strengthen us comes through regular study of His word. It always amazes me how when I take the time to study His word, I get refreshed to a point where I can now face whatever it is I have to face in the day. That in effect is what this verse is teaching us.

31. Verse 118: You reject all who stray from your decrees, for their deceitfulness is in vain. ¹¹⁹ All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross; therefore I love your statutes.
- a) Both of these verses say in effect that God rejects those who turn from His laws.
 - i) So does this mean I'm going to hell if I don't read my bible enough? No, that is not it at all. The point is people who don't care about what God desires for their lives will suffer not only in this life, but also eternally from that desire to ignore Him.
 - ii) Let me explain this a different way: Most of us know people or know of people who appear to be successful, but for all intents and purposes, don't care about pleasing God. Besides the fact they may or may not be unhappy people on the inside, the point is what is the length of this life in comparison to eternity? They may have rewards in life now, but in effect that is all they will get for eternity.
 - b) OK John, you have lectured us in the past that the psalms are written for believers to study and not for unbelievers. In other words, "forget them, how does this affect me?"
 - i) For starters it is the reminder not to be jealous of the success of others. We don't know the eternal fate of "successful" people. We should have enough to deal with when we focus on our own lives. Doing our best to make a difference for God, taking care of our own business should be enough fill up one's life.
 - c) Before I move on, let me comment on the word "dross". Verse 119 says God removes the wicked people like dross. Dross is something that grows on metal. It is literally a mass of solid impurities that needs to be separated from metal. If one ever works with silver or other metals, dross needs to be removed in order for the metal to shine.
 - i) It is a good analogy to compare dross to sin. That is because dross has no good purpose. Traditional metal workers didn't save dross for some other purpose. It was discarded as waste. Now think of sin: It has no secondary use that it could be considered, other than to learn from one's mistakes. The point is God thinks so lowly of sin that it is like useless dross that needs to be eliminated from our lives.
32. Verse 120: My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.
- a) We finish this section with a statement by the psalmist about fear of God. I'll explain that in a second. The second half of this verse states how in awe he is of God's laws.
 - b) Know that fearing God is considered the "beginning of wisdom". This is stated near the start of the book of Proverbs (1:7). The point is not literally to walk around shaking in fear of God. The idea for the believing Christian is to understand how much God hates sin. Therefore, if it is our desire to please Him, we should hate sin as much as we love Him.
 - i) To say it in a simpler way, the believer does not avoid sin out of fear of losing one's salvation. The Christian avoids sin because we want to please God.
 - c) This leads to the second part of this verse. By studying God's laws we can understand just how He wants us to live. Again, we are not subject to those laws for our salvation, but if it is our desire to please God and make a difference for Him. We should study those laws to learn the principals about how God desires we live our lives.
 - i) Confused? Then just remember that God desires we learn the law not to get points with Him, but because it helps us to live the type of life He desires of us.
 - ii) That leads well to the next section of eight verses, because the next topic is about obedience. Let me give you Verse 121 and then I'll explain obedience a little more.
33. Verse 121: I have done what is righteous and just; do not leave me to my oppressors.
- a) OK, we now start another group of eight verses here. I can summarize these eight by the statement, "Help me God to focus on trusting You". The Christian life is not about trying hard to be obedient to God, but is about letting Him work through us to give us the ability to worship Him and be obedient to Him in the first place.
 - b) With that said, let's look at Verse 121: Once again, the psalmist is describing some moment in his life where he is in some sort of trouble. Whoever the psalmist enemies were, they were close enough to the psalmist that they were a real threat to his life.

- i) Remember that Satan's forces do not want us to be a good witness for God. Therefore, there is always somebody or something near by when we are living to make a difference for God. As I occasionally say, "If you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile and watch things just happen to your life."
- c) That scary thought leads me back to this verse. If we are willing to trust God to do what is right, through His power we can have victory over any and all oppressors.
 - i) In other words, if we are willing to trust God to lead our lives down the path He desires for our lives, we don't have to fear whatever our enemies what to do to us.
 - ii) But John, you don't know how difficult my life is right now. I do know that our best hope is to trust in God to see us through those various trials of our lives.
 - iii) Meanwhile, the psalmist is complaining about his problems as well. Verse 122:
- 34. Verse 122: Ensure your servant's well being; let not the arrogant oppress me.
 - a) In this verse the psalmist is asking God to ensure (protect) his life. OK, if God knows all things, why should we pray for His protection? The answer is God may know all things, but we don't. This is a prayer to be rescued out of our problem of the moment.
 - b) It is the reminder of our true dependence upon God in both good and bad times.
 - i) It is ok to ask for God's protection. This is a reminder that the creator of the universe cares about our lives and desires us to do His will. If He does want us to follow Him, then it is ok to ask Him to ensure our well being.
- 35. Verse 123: My eyes fail, looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise.
 - a) Speaking of the concept of not knowing what God wants for our lives, I present this verse. It is saying in effect "I have tried so hard to figure out what You (God) want me to do, my eyes hurt from focusing on You so much".
 - b) So John, does this mean in order to know what God wants from me, I have to work until my eyes strain, like the psalmist is saying here? The way I describe it is, trusting in God is not about trying harder. It is about the willingness to be lead by Him. When God wants to get our attention, He is more than capable of doing so. We don't have to strain to find out what He wants at any moment in time. I find it is a simple matter of moving forward, seeking Him regularly, and trust that He is guiding us.
 - c) So if that is true, why does the psalmist say his eyes are failing here? It's due to the fact the psalmist loves God so much, he is making ever effort to seek Him as much as possible.
- 36. Verse 124: Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees.
 - a) The request here is in effect, "I'm tired of straining to know what it is You (God) want from my life. Help me just to trust in Your love for me and help me to understand as I read my bible what it is You want me to learn from my reading today."
 - b) Stop and consider in effect what a wonderful request that is. Imagine telling your boss at work, "I want to do a better job of serving you. Show me how I can do my job better".
 - i) I believe God appreciates it when we ask Him in effect, "How I can I be a better servant of You?" That in effect is what the psalmist is asking in this verse.
- 37. Verse 125: I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.
 - a) That request for understanding continues in Verse 125. The simple difference is in Verse 124 the request is based on God's love for us. In Verse 125 the same request is for God to give us the discernment to understand what it is He wants us to learn.
- 38. Verse 126: It is time for you to act, O LORD; your law is being broken.
 - a) The psalmist was somehow dealing with people who have willfully violated God's law. The psalmist is saying, "Dear God, act now, because others are sinning around me."
 - b) Think of this in terms of trying to live a life that is pleasing to God and having to deal with people who are not kind to us. In other words, we need God's help to deal with others. One of the hardest things to learn in life is we can't fix other people. We can pray for them, but we can't change them. All we can do is love them the way they are and ask God to help us deal with such situations.

39. Verse 127: Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold, ¹²⁸ and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path.
- a) When Verse 127 says that we should love God's commands more than gold, it is not a command to ignore making a living. It is about putting God in perspective of our lives.
 - b) The idea here in effect is to put God first in our lives, and then take care of what we have to do to survive in this world. If we love making money more than reading our bible, that is a sure sign we in trouble.
 - i) OK John, we are now 127 verses into this psalm. By now, we all the get the idea that God's word should be the most important physical asset we have. We should desire reading it more than any material thing. Why state that here at this point?
 - a) The reality of this world is that it is always easy to get our focus off of a God we cant see and get our focus on things we can see, including material things like gold. Sometimes we need that regular reminder of what is truly important in life and that is why a verse like this is here at this point.
 - c) This leads to the last verse of this group: It is a statement that the right thing to do in life always involves understanding God's way of doing things versus our own way.
 - i) The point is when it comes to making good decisions the secret is to consider what is the right thing to do in terms of pleasing God. That is the reminder of this verse.
 - ii) What if my issue doesn't have a biblical basis? The answer is to make the best decision possible and trust that God is guiding that decision. I usually find that if God wants us down a different path in life, He will make that obvious to us.
40. At this point, we have finished another 40 verses of this "mountain" of a psalm. There are still 48 verses left, and I figure in the next lesson we will make a run for that finish line.
- a) I spent many years of my life as a long distance runner. One thing I have learned from those years is that even when one can see the finish line, it is always further away than one realizes when we first visually spot it.
 - i) At the same time, the finish line is in site, and that gives us the strength to move on toward that goal. My point is when you take on a big project like this psalm, even when we see the finish line, know that it is still a good distance away.
 - b) OK, John, and what about this lesson we are finishing. What do you say in closing?
 - i) Since we are in the "downhill" portion of this marathon of studying Psalm 119. Seeing that finish line of the psalm ending should give us the courage to go on.
 - ii) Know that God is never worried that we are "behind schedule". Living our life is always about working on His timing and not ours. It is about trusting that He is guiding our lives, although we don't always understand how or why. In the meantime we keep on seeking Him and trusting that He is guiding us.
 - iii) Since we are trusting in God to lead us, that makes life easier then trying to fix things ourselves and solve our own problems. In that sense, life is "downhill" because God is guiding us to that finish line which is ahead in the distance.
41. Let me end by giving one final comment about developing a love relationship with His word. It is not a requirement to be a Christian to spend time daily in His word. The issue is if we do love God, then we should understand what it is He desires for our lives. We discover His desires by living by the principals taught in the bible. That is a key point of this psalm.
42. With that said, let me close in prayer: Father, we don't always understand why You lead us down the specific paths of our lives. We don't understand why you allow us to go through painful moments. We just know that trusting in You is still the best choice we can make for our lives. Help us to keep our focus on the reality of Your existence and Your desire to guide our lives. Help us to trust in the principals that we read in Your word and appreciate it far more than anything and everything this world has to offer. With guidance from Your word, help us to live to make a difference for You with our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.